



# Durham E-Theses

---

## *The religious aspects of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.*

Armstrong, Darren Philip

### How to cite:

---

Armstrong, Darren Philip (1994) *The religious aspects of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1044/>

### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE WORKS OF J. R. R. TOLKIEN

by

DARREN PHILIP ARMSTRONG

A thesis submitted for Ph.D to the University of Durham, (researched in the Departments of English and Theology); submitted in 1994.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.

No quotation from it should be published without

his prior written consent and information derived

from it should be acknowledged.



27 JUL 1994

The religious aspects of the works of J.R.R.Tolkien:

a thesis by D.P.Armstrong.

The Argument:

This thesis maintains that no comprehensive assessment of the work of J.R.R.Tolkien can be made without giving due weight to him as a religious writer, in the senses that : (a) he maintained an æsthetic that is intrinsically Christian, believing that certain kinds of fantasy can bring new insights of the fallen world; (b) that writing, or sub-creating, was for him an essentially religious activity, participating in the myth of Creation; (c) his major fantasy texts contain subtle, often subliminal allusions to the Judæo-Christian scriptures, although stripped of any dogmatic content; and (d) his major texts assume a cultural authority, through an allusive use of imagery and imitation of scriptural syntax to operate as a quasi-scripture. I also consider Tolkien's treatment of major theological issues and assess how well suited the format of fantasy fiction is for the exploration of such themes.

## CONTENTS

p. 1.....Introduction.

### PART ONE

7a.....Chapter One: Fantasy as Heuresis

40.....Chapter Two: A Mythic Grammar

92..... Chapter Three: Mythic Consciousness and Sub-creation

### PART TWO

123.....Chapter Four: Tolkien and the Language of Scripture

156.....Chapter Five: A Light from the Shadows

210.....Chapter Six: The Existential Hobbit

277.....Chapter Seven: The *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*;  
Tolkien, the religious thinker.

294.....Appendix: The Major Publications of J. R. R. Tolkien

303.....Bibliography.



The copyright of this thesis rests with the Author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to provide a perspective by which J.R.R. Tolkien may be evaluated as a *religious* writer. My contention is that, though he is many other things besides, an exhaustive assessment of his rôle in post-war English literature is not possible without fully recognising the importance of his contribution to religious fiction. Specifically I intend to explore the two-fold proposition that Tolkien is a religious writer in the senses that :

[a] the very act of writing was, for Tolkien, a religious act,

and

[b] Tolkien's fictional texts are capable of functioning as religious texts.

The three chapters that comprise the first section of this study will address themselves to Proposition [a], to the Tolkienian doctrine of sub-creation, beginning with a discussion of the three psychological processes he claims are brought about through the reading and writing of sub-created fantasy; Escape, Recovery and Consolation. An attempt is made to understand these phenomena as parts of an heuristic process, through which the subject can work towards a greater knowledge of God, through an analogy with the catholic systematic theology of Bernard Lonergan. Chapter Two describes the Romantic linguistic tradition to which Tolkien belonged, and explains how both it, and Tolkien's preoccupation with the problem of poetically recovering a pre-lapsarian language, resolve themselves into a question of the religious/mythic notion of the Fall. Tolkien's belief that through sub-created fantasy man can go some way towards transcending his fallen nature is examined with reference to his fictional works. The third chapter addresses the question of the mythic status of the act of sub-creation itself,

relating the mythic and the religious in their common concern to re-enact the cosmogonic moment, and also considers how the underlying psychological principles are both used by, and indeed compel, Tolkien in other aspects of his fiction.

The second part of this study is concerned with, what I have designated above, Proposition [b]; in it, I attempt a detailed examination of Tolkien's fictional texts, paying particular attention to what I regard as his major achievements, The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. The argument underlying Chapters Four and Five is that these works aspire to the status of what I shall call a *quasi-scripture*. By this term, I mean that they not only function as scripture within the fictional universe that they describe, but also that they are both capable of operating on the reader through a subtle quality-by-association technique,' subliminally evoking the feel, or *ambiance* of canonical scripture and thereby appropriating something of its immense cultural authority, and yet without ever actually referring directly to them in a manner that would prove intrusive within the context of the fictionality of Tolkien's works. Chapter Four concentrates on The Silmarillion and its manipulation of the forms and language of the Old Testament, while Chapter Five is concerned with the use of reforged biblical imagery, which serves to increase the emotional depth of The Lord of the Rings. An attempt is also made, at this point, to assess Tolkien's understanding and use of archetypes, as described in the works of C.G.Jung, which underlie and account for much of the impact of not only Tolkien's own works, but all religious imagery in general, and that of the Bible in particular. Chapter Six tests the hypothesis of Tolkien's texts as quasi-scripture still further, by asking whether they would respond productively to a demythologising process similar to that to which Rudolf Bultmann has subjected parts of the New Testament. In attempting an existential interpretation of Tolkien's major fiction, specifically Tolkienian doctrines of theological issues such as the existence of evil, free will, temptation and sacrifice are uncovered. Time and again it will be found that religious issues, for Tolkien, resolve themselves into the sin of possessiveness, that state which St Paul describes as 'living in the flesh', and the opportunity afforded by sub-creation to transcend such a state.

Before arguing this thesis proper, I shall take this opportunity to make a number of preliminary remarks. The first point I must stress is that my claim for the importance of seeing Tolkien as a writer concerned with religious issues in no

way invalidates the views of those who see him as primarily a mythic writer or a fantasy writer. He is both of these, but as I shall demonstrate, both these dimensions have a religious foundation for Tolkien. Similarly there is the scholarly view, encouraged by his own comments, that his works are the result of 'a philological game'; an attempt to provide a universe in which his beloved invented languages could be spoken. Again, there is a great deal of truth in this view, as Shippey's excellent study has shown,<sup>2</sup> but as I hope to demonstrate in Chapter Two, even Tolkien's fascination with ancient languages was heavily informed by his pervasively religious *Weltanschauung*.

The most often encountered objection to such an attempt to tie Tolkien's work to a wider philosophy is that in writing *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, he was simply producing a fantasy romance such as he himself took pleasure in reading. This point is certainly part - but only part - of the truth; Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, dissatisfied with the availability of novels of the kind they both enjoyed, decided to write their own.<sup>3</sup> The results were Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* and Tolkien's incomplete *The Lost Road*,<sup>4</sup> which years later re-emerged transformed into the *Akallabêth* of *The Silmarillion*. But holders of the view that Tolkien's sole purpose was to entertain, either himself or others, should consider the following passage from the draft of a letter written by Tolkien to Peter Hastings in 1954:

*Since the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of Creation to making and Sub-creation (and subsidiarily with the related matter of 'mortality'), it must be clear that references to these things [i.e. to the 'mythic' past of Middle Earth] are not casual, but fundamental.<sup>5</sup>*

The 'whole matter' in question is of course *The Lord of the Rings*, of which only the first two volumes had been published at this time, but Tolkien's comment immediately prior to this passage on the importance of considering the novel in conjunction with the "more mythical histories of the Cosmogony, First and Second Ages"<sup>6</sup> make it clear that the above comments relate equally to *The Silmarillion*, to which *The Lord of the Rings* is but the poetic conclusion, despite its having been published twenty years earlier. Tolkien's phrase 'is mainly concerned with' embraces the twofold sense that I referred to above in setting out the aims of this study: Method and Subject; writing as a process and text as artifact. Both are



implicitly marked out as being consistently governed by a religious principle that relates the *poiēsis*, the 'making' of an artist, to the divine act of Creation itself, a principle to which Tolkien gives the name *sub-creation*.

Before proceeding further it might be well to establish exactly what I intend by the term 'religious'. Tolkien was a committed Roman Catholic, but none of the doctrines of his church can be easily found in his fictional works. One can hardly even claim that they are Christian novels, in the sense that Lewis' Narnian and Ransom series manifest an explicitly Christian content. Indeed Middle Earth is very much a pre-Christian society, having far more in common with the tragic Germanic pagan cosmos described by Tolkien in his celebrated *Beowulf* essay<sup>7</sup>. But as I shall argue in detail, the novels are products of Tolkien's own highly developed personal aesthetic which was itself intrinsically Christian, being closely dependent on the concept of redemption. Secondly, a distinction must be drawn between 'religion' in its narrower sense of 'that which pertains to active organized faiths and systems of worship, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or other', and of the wider psychological sense which embraces all concepts concerned with the relation of Man to the numinous, and which embraces not only the narrower sense, but also the bulk of the corpus of world mythology. Man's relationship with a deity, whether it be a personal god or an animistic environment, is inevitably the ground for questions of power and weakness, authority and validity, and as such we can detect elements common to all myths, whether they purport to concern themselves with what we would call spiritual matters, or are employed to reinforce political an/or social institutions.

In addition to this, it may be wise to recall that the great corpus of world mythology that is served up to our children as nursery reading is essentially religion that society has ceased to believe in. But this rather obvious point leads us to one less obvious, and of great significance to this study. Granted that religion is mythic in form by its very nature - for reasons I shall present in Chapter Two - we can see that a religion that is no longer believed in by anyone dwindles to the status of a nursery fable; *however* a religious myth that is implicitly believed in by everyone forms a monologic structure that presents a façade that is impervious to all criticism or even discussion. Within its own terms it may assert whatever it likes and no-one can gainsay it. It is only when the myth begins to be doubted, the merest flicker of faith being enough, when it begins to fray at the edges, as it were, that it becomes interesting; exegesis

becomes possible. One could carry the point all the way to the Bible and assert that the strength of the Gospels lies in their being essentially a myth in the early stages of decomposition. Internal contradictions give rise to doubt, which is the seed-bed for an active, rather than an unreflectingly passive faith; the moment the Christian faces these textual problems squarely, which unless he takes refuge in a dogmatic fundamentalist insistence that everything written in the Gospels is literally true, even though we mere mortals lack the wit to understand how this might be, the monological structure is broken and the bubble of textual autonomy is pricked. This point is applicable not only to the scriptures, but to any myth that claims absolute and irrefrangible authority on the strength of its internal cohesion, and as we shall see, is applicable to Tolkien's sub-created Secondary World, which he insisted could only succeed if totally internally coherent.

In claiming that Tolkien is a religious writer, I am then making another twofold statement. [1] He conforms to the narrow definition in working to a Christian aesthetic, and in utilizing Christian imagery, though in a sublimated form that reduces it to its mythic or archetypal foundation and then reconstitutes it in a form compatible with his own mythos, and [2] the content of the fictions exhibits a preoccupation with general mythico-religious themes such as temptation, fate, apocalypse and, especially, Creation. Putting together the two sets of distinctions, we find ourselves confronted with four aspects of Tolkien as a religious writer:

[i] His method is a Christian one, being determined by a Christian aesthetic. [Chapter One]

[ii] His method is a religious one, constituting an enactment of a mythic process, vis, the recreation of the cosmogonic moment through art. [Chapter Three]

[iii] His texts are Christian in that much of their themes and imagery allude to the Christian scriptures, though stripped of any doctrinal hermeneutic. [Chapters Two, Five & Six]

[iv] His texts are religious in that they are contrived to function as a quasi-scripture, drawing cultural authority by association from genuine scriptural material. [Chapters Four & Five]

In claiming Tolkien as a religious writer, all four of these meanings are implied, though in the detailed arguments of the following chapters I try to indicate where necessary precisely which distinction is intended. My use of the term 'theology' will hereafter signify a systematic study of the narrower of the two definitions of 'religion'.

\*\*\*\*\*

Over the last decade a huge amount of Tolkien's writings consisting of notes and drafts for his Middle-earth works, and obliquely related material such as *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* have been made available to the general public as *The History of Middle Earth* standing at the time of writing at nine volumes. These have been meticulously ordered, annotated, and I might say in view of Tolkien's notoriously difficult handwriting, deciphered, by his son Christopher Tolkien. I have, however, made only limited use of this material as much of it consists of the evolution of the languages and name-forms and multiple re-drafts of material working its way towards its published form. The former, while of great interest to any study of Tolkien as a creative philologist, is little to the point of the current enquiry, while as to the latter, I cannot help but feel that it would be dangerous to build hypotheses on material that Tolkien, by the very act of redrafting, had implicitly rejected. Where I have occasionally drawn on material from *The History of Middle Earth* is in cases where the actual act of redrafting indicates a specific intention on the part of the author which the single final published text in isolation is not capable of demonstrating, or in the rare case where an early intention on Tolkien's part that would have conformed thematically to the ideas I shall be examining in this study has been abandoned purely for narrative or aesthetic necessity (e.g. in Chapter Six I cite Tolkien's early intention that Sam should die on Mount Doom, which was quickly abandoned for reasons of the subsequent narrative, but which would have further adumbrated to Tolkien's theme of the heroic sacrifice of the Little Man).

The subsequent discussion assumes a fair degree of acquaintance on the part of the reader with the life and works of J.R.R.Tolkien. For the benefit of those not so familiar I have provided an appendix, which consists of brief notes on Tolkien's most important fictional and critical works that are relevant to this study, with synopses of plot and/or argument where ever such information is not discussed in detail in the main body of this study.

Footnotes are provided at the end of each chapter. A bibliography is provided at the end of the work.

Titles of works by Tolkien are frequently abbreviated in the notes as follows:

\*\*\*\*\*

#### NOTES ON INTRODUCTION

1. The phrase is Giddings'; see J.R.R.Tolkien: This Far Land
2. T.A.Shippey: The Road to Middle Earth
3. Humphrey Carpenter: The Inklings pp.65-6
4. Tolkien: L.R. ed. Christopher Tolkien, London.
5. The Letters ed. Carpenter, London 1981, p.188
6. ibid
7. Tolkien: Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936), pp.245-295



## CHAPTER ONE

### FANTASY AS HEURESIS

*If the most certain thing known about the author is that he also wrote Patience, Purity and The Pearl, then we have in Sir Gawain the work of a man capable of weaving elements taken from diverse sources into a texture of his own; and a man that would have in that labour a serious purpose. I would myself say that it is precisely that purpose that has with its hardness proved the shaping tool which has given form to the material, giving it the quality of a good tale on the surface, because it is more than that, if we look closer.*

1

These comments of Professor J.R.R.Tolkien on the author of the late fourteenth century romance, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, could so easily be applied to the fictional work of Tolkien himself. Those commentators who have persistently regarded Tolkien as the pastichist supreme of Germanic romance, or the enthusiastic re-caster of diverse but universal mythic motifs, as often as not fail to take account of his 'serious purpose'; a very serious purpose that is inseparable from religious issues that are at once Christian and more than Christian in character. As with *Sir Gawain*, it is this purpose that gives works like The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings their uniquely emotive power.

Tolkien's 'serious purpose' is to be the subject of this

enquiry. His style is far from being to the taste of many commentators, and indeed as examples of modern literature his works do stand out as anomalous, though as I hope to demonstrate, his ideosyncratic style, so redolent of mock-medievalism, is entirely appropriate to the kind of fiction he intended to produce, and that kind of fiction is one of relevance to the modern world. Critics like Stimson and Edmund Wilson, presumably through lack of sympathy rather than intelligence, have castigated his work as facile and two-dimensional, which is to treat only the surface story, which he deliberately cast in the unsophisticated form of myth, and to neglect the serious purpose of his myth-making. What follows will, I hope, at least give the lie to these short-sighted charges.

One of the first questions that might arise is what can be the meeting point between a systematic theology on the one hand, and Tolkienian fantasy on the other. The answer lies in the æsthetic doctrines to which Tolkien worked, which he set out in his Andrew Lang Lecture of 1937, later expanded into the essay On Fairy Stories.<sup>2</sup> He argues that literature in general, and fantasy in particular, is capable of effecting an alteration in man's conscious state, achieving a movement towards the reintegration of consciousness with the rest of creation and with his creator. Thus at the very outset, we find him specifically linking fantasy literature with a set of theological concerns, (the Fall, Redemption &c.). This movement, he claims, is effected through three interdependent psychological processes, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation, hereafter referred to as R/E/C when collectively intended. This alteration of consciousness involves a coming to see things "as we are, (or were) meant to see them"<sup>3</sup>, and as such constitutes an heuristic process. This may be accepted as one of the principal aims of most systematic theologies; to provide a structured process whereby a religious heuresis may be attained. But is the knowledge Tolkien's fantasy promises of a comparable nature, i.e. is it concerned with the relationship between God and man? Tolkien would unhesitatingly answer, yes. The sub-creative process is a re-enactment of God's

creation of the world, and of man's first sub-creative emulation of the divine act, Adam's naming of the animals, both of which stand as example of the logos in action; creation through the medium of the Word. Tolkien, as I shall subsequently discuss in much greater depth, regards imaginative literature as possessing an inherent potential for raising Fallen Man back to his intended position in the cosmos, a position that is tantamount to claiming for such literature the function of an instrument of grace.

In 1971, the American Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan published Method in Theology,<sup>4</sup> which presented a transcendental heuristic system consisting of four successive psychological processes, which may be collectively applied not only to all areas of theological enquiry but also to other aspects of everyday life. Lonergan's Method was first related to Tolkien's works in a curiously short and inadequately argued article by Steven Mark Deyo entitled One Upon a Time, Once upon a Parsec.<sup>5</sup> Deyo suggests that Lonergan's four levels of human consciousness are paralleled by Tolkien's four elements of sub-creation, Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation. I shall quote Deyo's brief but generally accurate exposition of Lonergan's thesis:

*Briefly, Lonergan says all knowledge is perceived through one type or another of Experience. The mind's subsequent ordering of the facts then yields Understanding, which must be evaluated critically in a stage Lonergan calls Judgement. In this way authentic knowledge reaches the deepest levels of consciousness: Dialectic (or Decision), where conversion (intellectual, emotional, social) occurs. Facts, says Lonergan, do not speak for themselves, being impotent when isolated. But facts perceived, interpreted, evaluated, and received make true knowledge - never ineffective and in some way ever life-changing.*<sup>6</sup>

There follows a table, portentously entitled 'the Deyo-Lonergan Heuresis Model':



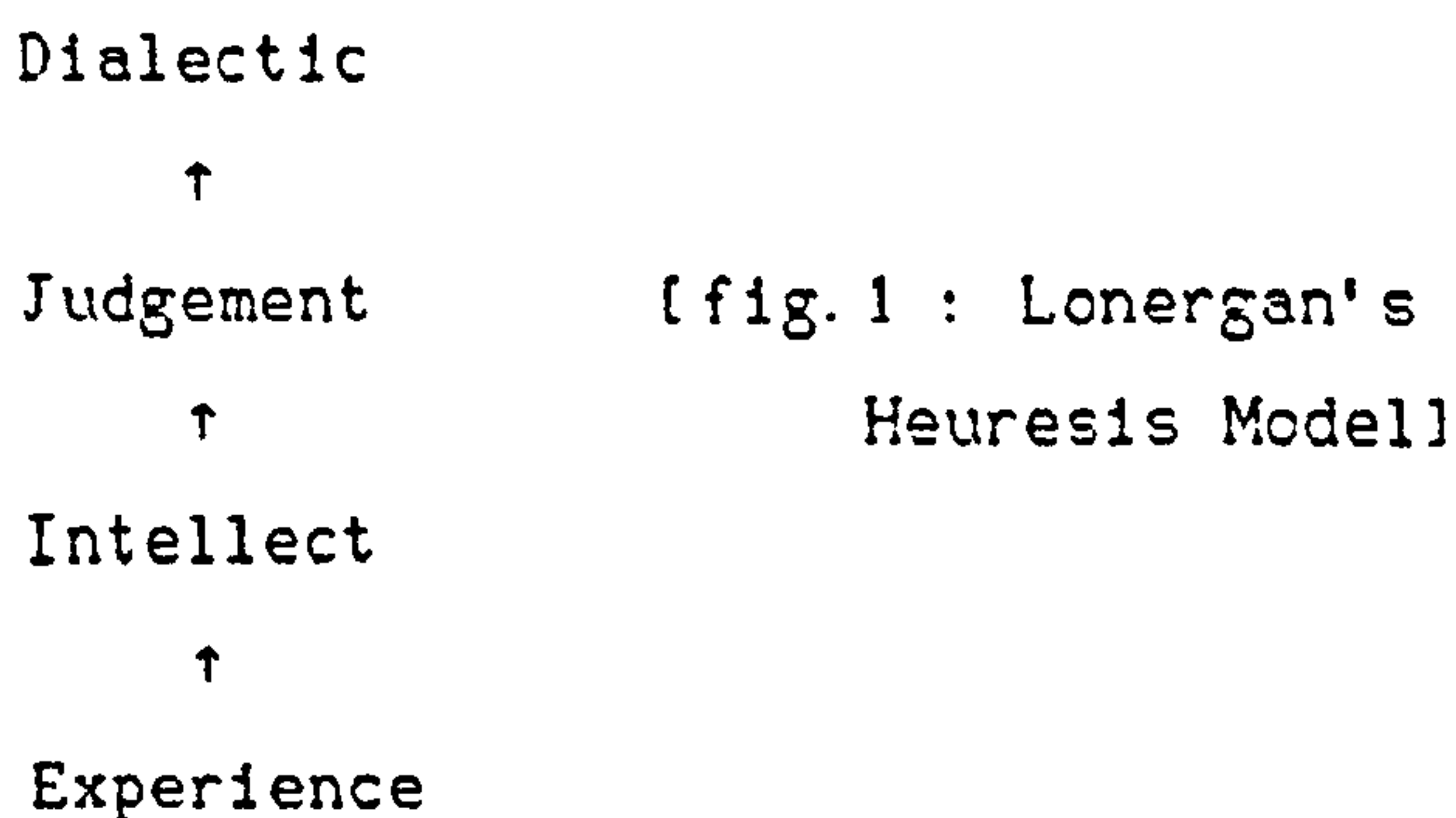
<i>Suspension of belief</i>	<i>(Fantasy)</i>	<i>Experience</i>
<i>Mystery of Story</i>	<i>(Escape)</i>	<i>Understanding</i>
<i>Discovery of truth</i>	<i>(Recovery)</i>	<i>Judgement</i>
<i>Eucatastrophe of faith</i>	<i>(Consolation)</i>	<i>Dialectic/Decision</i>

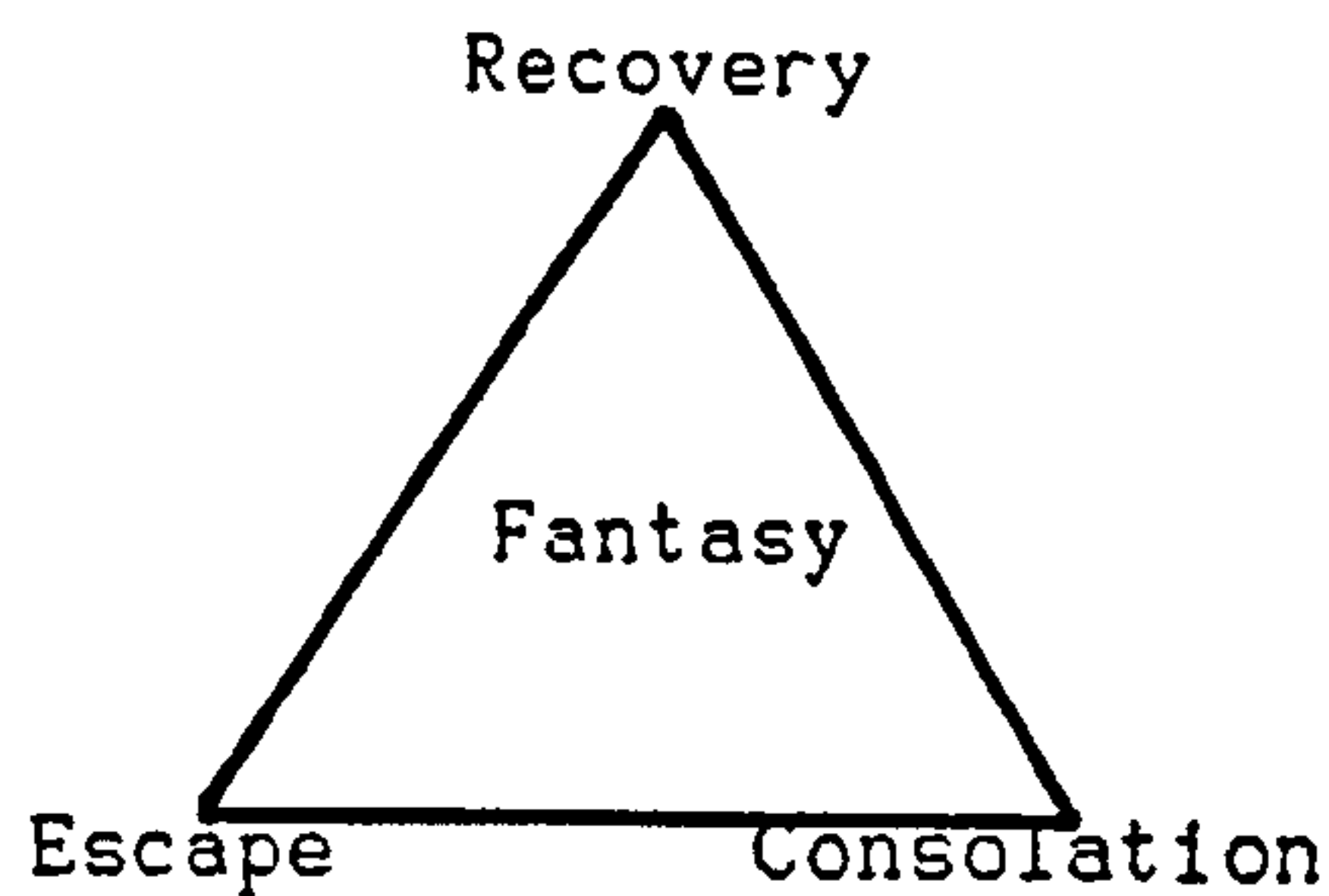
Deyo's arguments for this comparison are too thin to convince, and are in several respects mistaken, as will become clear in the ensuing discussion, though, as I hope to demonstrate, his instinct is correct and a comparison with Lonergan's method, properly formulated, will provide useful insights into the common conceptual ground between a systematic theology and literary fantasy as advocated and written by Tolkien. At the same time, I must emphasize the basic difference between Tolkien's sub-creative fiction and Lonergan's systematic theology. Any theological discourse of necessity takes the form of a secondary language, i.e. it attempts to describe that which lies outside itself. Tolkienian fantasy on the other hand is an attempt at autonomous creation, within which anything is permitted, within the bounds of the rules of consistency that Tolkien lays down. It recalls Derrida's displacement of the spoken word, according primacy to the text, to *écriture*, and arguing for its mediating position through which the actual world must be interpreted.

It follows then that the first problem with Deyo's approach is his use of the term 'parallel'. Lonergan's and Tolkien's are both models of psychological processes, but Tolkien's is determined by his æsthetic theory, while Lonergan addresses himself to the epistemological question of how knowledge and responsible action are transcendently derived from bald sense-data. The former is concerned with the act of creativity, and the latter with critical evaluation; one is a primary language, the other a secondary. Commentary on the gulf that separates the artist from the critic is legion, and it would be a brave man who would cheerfully accept Deyo's assertion that the two models run parallel to each other.

This alleged parallelism begins to break down almost as soon as we begin to examine the correspondence of its respective

parts. Lonergan's model is a series of contingent processes, which ascend from the first stage, that of perceptual experience which man shares with the higher animals, through intelligence (concept-formation based on perceptual data) and evaluation (of the ontological probability or otherwise of these concepts corresponding to an objective actuality), to the fourth, truly human, stage at which morally responsible action may be derived from the foregoing judgement of the facts. Tolkien, on the other hand, lays down no such hierarchal structure. His model involves a tripartite rather than a tetrapartite process; Fantasy is the catalyst for the process, not a constituent part of it. To make Tolkien's basic tenet perfectly clear, let me stress that sub-creation is the process of making (the act of writing), Fantasy is the thing made (the text) and Recovery, Escape and Consolation are the psychological results of the thing made (the reaction of the reader and also, as I shall explore later, of the author himself). Each of the elements of the triple R/E/C process is mutually dependent upon, and may occur simultaneously with, the other two phases. That Deyo has failed to pay proper attention to the hierarchical form of Lonergan's model, which is essential to the pattern of self-transcendence and the acquisition of the knowledge/love of God, is illustrated by the fact that in the passage quoted above, he refers to the Dialectic phase occurring at "the deepest levels of consciousness", in contrast to Lonergan's precise phrase: "the peak of consciousness - the *apex animae*"<sup>7</sup>. The structures of the respective models may be schematized thus:





[fig.2 : Tolkien's Sub-creation Model]

It would seem then that the alleged parallelism between the two psychological models is quite arbitrary. However a closer analysis of Tolkien's processes provides grounds for the salvaging of Deyo's comparison, yielding interesting insights in the process. My first objection, as outlined above, that of the generic differences between the two models (i.e. æsthetic and epistemological), may be overcome by two important factors which they hold in common;

[1] Tolkien's doctrine of sub-creation rests on the belief that Man makes because he is made, and furthermore, made in the image of a Maker. This is the central argument of a verse letter Tolkien sent to C.S. Lewis;

*The heart of man is not compound of lies  
 but draws some wisdom from the only Wise  
 and still recalls him. Though now long estranged  
 man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.  
 Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned  
 and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned,  
 his world-dominion by creative act:  
 not his to worship the great Artefact,  
 man, sub-creator, the refracted light  
 through whom is splintered from a single White  
 to many hues and endlessly combined*

*in living shapes that move from mind to mind.  
Though all the crannies of the world we filled  
with elves and goblins, though we dared to build  
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,  
and sow the seed of dragons, 'twas our right  
(used or misused). The right has not decayed.  
We make still by the law in which we're made."*<sup>11</sup>

The ontological first principal of sub-creation is therefore an affirmation of the existence of a deity, a sentient maker. Lonergan's transcendent method shares this assumption - while also purporting to provide the means to test it - in claiming that

*'we can inquire into the possibility of fruitful inquiry. We can reflect upon the nature of reflection. We can deliberate whether our deliberating is worth while. In each case there arises the question of God.'*<sup>12</sup>

That is, intellectual inquiry presupposes an objective correlative to its subjective conceptualizing, which is to attribute an ultimate intelligibility to the universe. We are therefore faced with the question of whether an intelligible universe is conceivable without an intelligible basis, which is a question about God. Similarly reflexive acts of judgement and deliberation are shown to resolve themselves into such a fundamental question of God's existence; variations on the Ontological Argument. If Tolkien's model is one of an æsthetic that finds its origin in theology, Lonergan's is one of epistemological justification that finds its inevitable telos in theology; which is to say that in both structures the existence of God is a prerequisite.

[11] The actions of Recovery, Escape and Consolation, individually and collectively, bring man to a greater understanding of his own nature and his position within creation; such, at least, was



Tolkien's claim. If he is correct, they do indeed prove heuristic in that they effect a process of self-discovery through the exercise (i.e. writing) and reception (reading) of sub-creativity. Lonergan's transcendent method is designed to arrive at the truth of any enquiry, but ultimately in its highest form which achieves a transcendence of the self, the truth about truth is its aim. Thus both may be accounted heuristic models, though they do not so much run parallel as converge upon the same point, the existence of God.

The second objection to the parallel theory, that the component processes within the respective models simply do not correspond closely enough, can only be overcome by a complete rethinking of the relations between them. The first move must be to abandon the term 'parallel' in favour of 'analogy', which removes any obligation to retain any structural correspondence between the two models as a whole external to whichever of the syzygies may be under consideration at any one time, thereby overcoming the problem of Lonergan's model being sequential and Tolkien's simultaneous.

## 11 Fantasy

As noted above, Tolkien's concept of Fantasy differs from Lonergan's perception phase of consciousness in that it is the vehicle in which the potentiality of the R/E/C processes inhere, whereas perception provides the sense data which sets off a chain reaction through Lonergan's three higher phases. Fantasy is not so much the first link in Tolkien's heuristic chain as the chain itself; it is the steel from which the other links (R/E/C) are forged. At this point it is important that we establish exactly what Tolkien means by the term Fantasy, a word that has gone through so many dogmatic permutations of definition since the Romantic movement, along with its close bedfellows, Imagination and Fancy, that a precise definition is necessary at the outset of any discussion.



Tolkien departs from the Coleridgean distinction between Primary and Secondary imagination and Fancy, insisting that to define Imagination as a higher phenomenon than mere image-making, or Fancy, is misleading and etymologically unjustified;

*An attempt is thus made to restrict, I should say, misapply, Imagination to 'the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.'<sup>10</sup>*

Coleridge, of course, has argued that Imagination is qualitatively distinct from Fancy, in that it forms the very ground of human perception (the Primary Imagination) and that it characteristically 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates' images and reconstitutes them in new and original forms, (the Secondary imagination). Fancy is defined as a commonplace faculty of reproducing mental images of 'fixities and definites', operating as 'a mode of memory, emancipated from the order of time and space.'<sup>11</sup>

Tolkien restricts the term Imagination to "the mental power of image making", (Coleridge's Fancy) arguing that it is quite distinct from that achievement that gives to the image 'the inner consistency of reality'. This achievement, which is the ground and inspiration for Secondary belief in the Secondary (ideal) world is termed by Tolkien, quite simply, Art, and it is this that mediates, that forms the 'operative link' between Imagination and the final artefact, the Sub-creation. Everyone has the ability to form mental images, but only the artist can process them in such a way as to cause Secondary belief in others; nevertheless, the faculty of Imagination differs in the artist and the 'layman' only in degree, not in kind. The term 'Fantasy' is used to embrace the whole process of sub-creating art and the sense of wonder that it conveys from the original (which is essentially what Tolkien intends by Recovery). Furthermore, it is the strength of the 'inner consistency of reality' (i.e. the degree of success of the Art of sub-creating), combined with the 'wonder' of the image, that inspire belief in the Secondary world. If the Art is not of

a high enough calibre, no belief will be engendered and the work will fail.

For all Tolkien's specific objections to Coleridge's definitions, there is however a broad area of agreement between them, as two of Coleridge's famous formulations indicate. His description of the Primary Imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM"<sup>12</sup> is a neat summary of the principle underlying Tolkien's whole notion of sub-creation, except that Tolkien subsumes it into the term 'Fantasy', that which raises mental-imaging to the status of a creative act. It is worth noting that Coleridge's linking of the Primary Imagination as "the prime agent of all human perception" with what might be termed the *imago dei* principle (the infinite I AM expressed within the individual human consciousness) recalls Berkeley's *esse est percipere* doctrine, which asserts that being is identical with the act of perceiving, as the corollary of the more famous doctrine that being lies in being perceived (*esse est percipi*), perceived ultimately by the mind of God.<sup>13</sup> The connection should alert us to the possible influence of Berkelean idealism in our examination of Tolkien's notions of sub-created Secondary worlds.

Secondly, Coleridge's assertion that the Secondary Imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates" recalls Tolkien's own working method in writing fiction. Unlike Lewis, who was wont to transfer large undigested chunks of Christian imagery to his fiction, particularly the overtly 'mythopoeic' Narnia series, Tolkien's method is to 'boil down' pre-existent imagery in his 'Soup of Tales', indeed dissolving, diffusing and dissipating it, before serving it up in a new form.

In the light of Tolkien's doubts about Coleridge's definitions, it becomes immediately apparent that Deyo has made a basic error in relating Fantasy to Perceptual Experience by describing it with the hackneyed formula, 'the suspension of belief'<sup>14</sup> (sic). Such a suspension, in Tolkien's formulation, would doom the sub-creation to failure.<sup>15</sup> It implies a negative definition of Fantasy, which is at odds with Tolkien's more positive insistence

that disbelief in a secondary world must not merely be suspended, but that belief must be positively inspired by the work's internal cohesion. Belief is a prerequisite of Fantasy just as much as of religion, and if that belief is, even for one moment, suspended, interrupted or destroyed, the integrity of the Secondary world inevitably lapses, because of either a failure of artistic skill to sustain the illusion of reality,<sup>16</sup> or a failure of artistic judgement in introducing material that is inconsistent with the natural laws of that Secondary world as established by the author. In either case, *"you're out in the Primary world again, looking at the little abortive Secondary world from the outside."* <sup>17</sup>

It seems richly ironic that a man so firmly rooted in the traditions of Romanticism should apparently evolve a literary theory of textual autonomy, stripping away any overt allusion to the primary world, after the formalist manner of the New Criticism. Where this differs from the New Critics is in their provision for sounding out the contents of a text through an intertextual framework. A totally autonomous text, like a myth universally believed, constitutes a monologic structure that stands impervious to criticism or any discussion at all. Within its own terms it may function in any way it sees fit, and it is at this point we begin to suspect that Tolkien's argument cannot be as rigorously applied as he seemed to think. *"Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun,"* he says; *"Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough....to make a Secondary World in which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elven craft."* <sup>18</sup> All this is fair enough; certainly the writing of fantasy does require special skills, and no writing is easy. But Tolkien is here undermining the concept of a totally autonomous Secondary World by importing into it from the Primary World a need for credibility. Clearly anything does *not* go, as it might in an absolutely autonomous text. Green suns are permissible if and only if they can be convincingly



integrated into the rest of the Secondary cosmos. Were this not so, and Tolkien's texts stood as internalised independent structures, impervious to comment, the plethora of discussion on his works, of which this study is but a tiny part, would not - could not - intelligibly exist. Secondary belief therefore depends upon the internal integrity of the Secondary World, which itself, whether Tolkien likes it or not, necessarily alludes to standards of judgement and belief derived from the Primary World. Tolkien obliquely acknowledges this in admitting that "every sub-creator....hopes that he is drawing on reality; hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it" <sup>12</sup> I shall return to this important point in the final chapter.

To return to the problem of Deyo's comparison, we find that Tolkien also provides us with material to rescue the analogy between Fantasy and the first phase of Lonergan's heuresis model. If the sub-creation is successful, if it inspires Secondary belief, it will imply a substitute manifold of sense data. He comments;

*It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; trees and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.*<sup>13</sup>

And further,

*Enchantment produces a secondary world into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses, while they are inside...*

It must be born in mind that during the experiential stage of Lonergan's method one need not be concerned as to whether there is any objective vindication for the sense data being received; that lies within the province of the third transcendent phase, that of Judgement. Experience may take a non-sensory or quasi-

sensory form, as in a dream, an hallucination or a memory, false or otherwise; there can be no distinction between objective and subjective experiences at this perceptual stage. As neither is privileged above the other, it seems reasonable then to bracket the experience of fictional objects with these quasi-sensory experiences. If this is allowed, then while the reader is 'inside' the Secondary world, while he is in the grip of Secondary belief, the Fantasy as Tolkien defines it - that Art which actualizes the Image and conveys something of its strange idealist purity or 'wonder' - is what he experiences. His perceptual experiences are the images, textures, sounds and scents of the Fantasy. Were this not the case, a novel the size of The Hobbit would be interminably tedious, while a work the length of The Lord of the Rings would be utterly unreadable. It would imply that the act of reading involves a retention at the very forefront of consciousness of the knowledge that one is seated in one's own armchair interpreting a series of hyletic signs printed on a page according to a code previously acquired and relating them to concepts corresponding to similar, if not identical, concepts in the mind of the author at the time of writing. This seems a fair description of the psychological act of reading (at least as far as those espousing any form of reception theory of art is concerned, though alternatives are of course available), but it has little relevance to our experience of reading, wherein we partially surrender consciousness of our actual surroundings and enter imaginatively into the Secondary world of the text. After all, a piece of writing requires a reader in order to achieve completion, to become a text, a principle Tolkien tacitly acknowledges in the afore-quoted passage, when he admits the reader to a rôle in the sub-creational process with the phrase '*...a Secondary world into which designer and spectator can enter*'. The knowledge of one's actual situation is of course retained, if repressed; were this not the case we should be incapable of distinguishing fantasy from reality, and all Plato's warnings about the danger posed to society by the poets would have been justified. But, again in Tolkien's terms, if, when reading,

consciousness that one is 'only reading a story' is not backgrounded, an active Secondary belief will prove impossible and the work fails as art.

At a fundamental level, all of Lonergan's processes are engaged in the reading act. At the perceptual stage the raw material of experience is the hyletic component of the printed page, while the secondary, intellectual phase consists of discovering the noetic content and relating it to pre-existent mental concepts, in short, of the act of reading and understanding. The judgement phase consists in making a distinction between the referents of a factual documentary text and of a fiction; the ontological status of the noesis must be assessed. In the fourth stage the reader must decide whether the text interests him and whether it is worth his while to carry on reading. That this process must take place, within the terms of Lonergan's discourse, seems reasonably clear. Equally clear, however, is the need to withhold awareness of it from the forefront of consciousness during the act of reading. Attention must be firmly fixed on the noetic content, and by a curious sleight of hand the judgement process temporarily promotes the fictive content of the text to the status of the noetic content of primary perceptual experience.

Two more observations need to be made. First, that not every fictional text will achieve this substitution, depending as they do upon the skill, or Art, of their author. Secondly, Tolkien's comments on Fantasy literature so far examined are more or less applicable to every other form of fiction, realism included. Indeed the realist novel attempts to create a secondary world so closely modelled upon the real world that during the reading act the two may be superimposed. Any lapse in the integrity of such a text will stand out as a glaring inaccuracy and the secondary belief, already stretched taut to cover the two worlds, will be most easily punctured.



### iii Escape

The Escape concept is possibly the most problematic of the components of Sub-creation in that much of the energies that shaped it were obviously drawn from Tolkien's personal predilections and prejudices. 'Escapism' is a legitimate spiritual reaction to the ugliness of 'the Robot Age' in which we live, he claims.<sup>20</sup> Fantasy contains more fundamental reality than the modern world; the latter can offer only garish street lighting, the latter is illuminated by lightning. Conventional condemnation of escapist tendencies, the imputation to those who hold them of cowardice, of an inability to adjust to the rigours of real life is misplaced, Tolkien argues. It is to confuse "the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter"

The first half of the section dealing with Escape in On Fairy Stories resembles not so much a dialectic argument as an exposition of a profound nostalgic regret that characterized Tolkien the man. His devotion to the natural environment and to trees in particular is well known, particularly through its successful sublimation into descriptive imagery in the Shire and Lothlórien episodes in The Lord of the Rings, and in the character of Samwise the gardener. But it is all too easy to characterize this unashamedly sentimental view of the rural English countryside as reactionary emotivism, a prim, æsthetic rejection of "the 'grim Assyrian' absurdity of top-hats, or the Morlockian horror of factories".<sup>21</sup> A far more important psychological trend underlies the need to escape, which emerges upon consideration of precisely what Tolkien believed we were escaping from. "There are," he writes, "other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness and extravagance of the internal combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice and death." In effect man is seeking to escape not from the modern world per se, but from Man's Fallen condition, of which the rigours of the modern world are but an outward manifestation. This is confirmed by Tolkien's statement that "lastly there is the

*oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape; the Escape from Death.*"<sup>22</sup>

The concept of the Fall is central to Tolkien's *Weltanschauung*, in both its theological sense, as a Catholic, and its linguistic sense, as a philologist. As I shall demonstrate, it informs all three of the R/E/C processes. Escape from the lapsarian condition is of course synonymous with redemption and as such might be expected to play a central rôle in any Christian poetics; such being, as I believe, what Tolkien was attempting to formulate.

Deyo's model inverts the order in which Tolkien usually presents Recovery and Escape, so that it might better fit his parallel argument, but since Tolkien's, unlike Lonergan's, system is not sequential, this is of no importance. What is important is that Deyo once again invalidates his argument by an imprecise reading of his two primary texts. In his heuresis model he defines Escape as 'mystery of story', without attempting any explanation as to what this has to do with the Intellectual process of Lonergan's model. Lonergan obligingly provides us with a definition of mystery in describing the phenomenon of Love; mystery is that which is perceived but not known, i.e. it is manifest at the experiential level but is neither conceptualized by the Understanding nor evaluated at the Judgement level.<sup>15</sup> This would appear firmly to rule out Deyo's equation of Escape with Understanding as the second heuristic process is simply not engaged, in Lonergan's terms, whenever mystery is experienced. My concern, however, is to prove neither Deyo nor Lonergan to be right, nor to force an artificial analogy between Tolkien's system and Lonergan's, but rather to attempt an insight into any theological dimension the former might have by viewing it in conjunction with the latter. Let us for the moment then leave aside Deyo's troublesome glossing of Escape with 'mystery of story' and examine the concept as Tolkien expounds it next to Lonergan's model.

Tolkien insists that the making and enjoying of fantasy is a *rational* rather than an irrational pursuit.<sup>23</sup> The tale of the



Frog King is effective precisely because we hold distinct concepts of Kingship and Froghood, and reason tells us that it simply is not the done thing for princesses to marry frogs. Were such unions commonplace in the primary world, or were we to lack the necessary faculties to adduce that they are not, there would be no point in the fairy tale. Some of the most bizarre fantasy ever written, the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, was the product of a professional mathematician, a mind accustomed to rational thought. After all, a negated logical system is structurally just as logical as its positive counterpart, however absurd the results may seem when it is applied to the world we perceive around us. Now reason is the cognitive process whereby concepts are formulated and connected, so Understanding must have an important rôle to play in Fantasy. But can this rôle be traced to the Escape process? By Escape we must understand the temporary suspension of our awareness of our actual situation, in the act of reading, and the privileging of the imaginatively reconstructed Secondary world of the text. The sense data of the primary world is displaced by the descriptive content of the text, which now provides the basic experiential material on which the other three heuristic processes depend. The Escape from the primary world is therefore effected via the experiential process, but remains incomplete; the cell door may be unlocked but the prisoner has yet to negotiate his way past the guards and out of the dungeon. Fantasy, like everything else at the experiential level remains but a meaningless manifold of chaotic images, visual or otherwise. It lacks any 'inner consistency of reality' until the Understanding is brought to play upon it, conceptualizing the images and relating them to one another. It is therefore at Lonergan's second phase, the Intellectual, that the Secondary world is re-created in the mind of the reader,<sup>24</sup> and in a consistent enough form to inspire secondary belief. It is this recreation of world and belief that constitutes Tolkien's Escape. Furthermore, it is at the intellectual stage that the 'quality and wonder of the Expression derived from the Image', which Tolkien

indicates is an integral part of Fantasy, is located, as the phrase 'derived from the Image' (i.e. Experience) reveals. It is this 'wonder' that constitutes the mystery of Fantasy at this heuristic level, thus enabling us to salvage even Deyo's position. Another species of mystery occurs at the Judgement level, as we shall see.

### iii] Recovery

The analogy between Tolkien's Recovery process and Lonergan's Judgement phase works very well, and this time Deyo's model provides an adequate gloss on Recovery, "Discovery of Truth", which neatly bridges the two concepts. For Lonergan the Judgement process evaluates the likelihood of the concepts or inferences, constructed by the Intelligence out of the Experiential data, proving to relate to some actual reality.<sup>25</sup> Tolkien's process attempts a similar goal:

*Recovery, (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining - regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they really are' and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them' - as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things we see clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness and familiarity - from possessiveness.<sup>26</sup>*

In other words, the acquisition - or re-acquisition - of some sort of objective perspective on Creation. The idea is closely bound up with the concept of unfallen man's identification with Creation; the very word 'possessiveness' implies a subject/object relationship, focussing on Man's rôle as possessor, whereby his relationship with his environment is inevitably altered by the very fact of his possessing. At least a part of the Recovery

process involves what the Russian formalists called *ostranenie* ('defamiliarization'), and is applicable to fantasy in general. It is the principle that lies behind the anthropomorphism in such works as Richard Adams' Watership Down, where the imputation of human characteristics to rabbits paradoxically serves to highlight aspects of human social organization, the use and abuse of power and the relationship of the individual to the state. But Adams is careful to heed Tolkien's warnings about internal cohesion and the danger of fantasy degenerating into straightforwardly anthropomorphized animal fable<sup>27</sup>; the issues of specifically human concern are successfully sublimated into what read like authentic lapine concerns. Thus the establishment of the Watership warren under Hazel's democratic authority is only possible after a rejection of various socio-political structures represented by other rabbit societies; from the paternalistic enlightened despotism of the Sandleford warren, through the effete decadence that masks the emasculated, appeasing, puppet government of Cowslip's warren, to the brutal totalitarian regime of Efrafa under General Woundwort.<sup>28</sup>

These political dimensions would appear nothing short of ridiculous were they not submerged in a plot of direct relevance to rabbit life, i.e. the quest to found a new warren and the provision of does to stock it. Tolkien makes extensive use of the defamiliarization technique; the humanity of the hobbits is all too apparent precisely because they are not human. Their diminutive stature and furry feet allows us to approach them initially as things 'other' than ourselves, the better to see ourselves reflected in them, until before we know it we are identifying with the hobbits far more strongly than with any of the other characters. The human values they represent have achieved a sharper definition, as we recover a fresh perception of them.

Many commentators, when discussing Tolkien's concept of Recovery, have fallen into the trap of partially quoting his comments on Chestertonian fantasy, or Mooreeffoc, and thus conveying the impression that this and only this was what



Tolkien intended by the term. This is not the case. *Mooreeffoc* was of course the word 'coffeeroom' read backwards through a glass door by Dickens, and was coined by Chesterton "to denote the queerness of things become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle." This is an experience common to most of us, and Tolkien commends it, as far as it goes, but warns that its scope is limited to "a recovery of freshness of vision." This is a little puzzling, since 'recovery of freshness of vision' had seemed to be what Tolkien means by Recovery, but his contrast indicates he intends something of far greater importance. He contrasts *Mooreeffoc* with the recovery brought about through Creative Fantasy which, through a process of mythologizing - I might say, re-mythologizing - experience, is capable of a profound re-defining of Man's relationship with his surroundings. The precise difference between the limited Chestertonian recovery of freshness of vision, and the radical recovery promised by Tolkien may at this stage seem a little unclear, as indeed it is in his essay, but will become explicit when I come to examine the far-reaching effects of Owen Barfield's work, particularly Poetic Diction, on Tolkien's views on mythology and language in Chapter Three.

The question of Judgement, of the objective likelihood of a proposition, brings into focus another problem; that of the metaphysical status of Secondary belief. Tolkien, as noted, would have no truck with any theory of 'suspension of belief', insisting that a fiction can only succeed if it inspires a comprehensive Secondary belief. But what is Secondary belief, other than a real belief in an object one knows perfectly well does not exist, and is such a thing possible? The relationship between the text and the reader's belief in its content is a complex one. One's reaction to a factual written account is different from that to a fiction, but it is far from being a black-and-white distinction. It would be too gross a generalization to say that one believes the first and does not believe the second. We all know that Wuthering Heights does not describe actual events or people, though it would be absurd to say that we 'don't believe' the

novel; any novel of which one can honestly say that is unquestionably a novel that fails. It lacks 'the inner consistency of reality'. Furthermore, when one considers factual belief, it is found that further distinctions occur. For example, were I to give an honest account of the view as I now see it from my window, the quality of the reader's belief in my account would differ from the quality of his belief in, say, a contemporary account of the death of Charles I. While accepting that neither account could possibly achieve total objectivity, my account is capable of empirical verification by the reader simply coming round to my study and looking out for himself; the historical account is incapable of empirical verification of this kind, the best one is able to do being to consult other historical documents for corroboration, which in their turn are subject to the same limitations, and so on in an infinite regression. Even if we could be sure that the writer was neither committed Royalist nor died-in-the-wool Puritan, with a propagandic axe to grind, and that the document was furthermore quite authentic and not a later forgery, one would still afford the historical narrative a different kind of belief to that given to my account of the contemporary view from my window. Yet another species of belief would be inspired by an account in a reputable scientific journal describing in detail the action of human enzymes on a recently discovered serum. In all these cases we might well believe what we read, but the experience of belief would differ in each case. I stress that the difference would be one of quality of belief and not quantity.

When we turn to consider fiction we find that Secondary belief, as I have claimed, replaces Primary belief at the forefront of our consciousness. The qualitative difference of belief in the respective statements '*Margaret Thatcher exists*' and '*Bilbo Baggins exists*' is obvious, though when Tolkien tells us that "*In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit*" we do not *disbelieve* him, for all we know that hobbits do not and never have existed in actuality. The criteria by which we evaluate the truth factors of a proposition are different if that proposition

is recognized to be part of a fiction. The existential copula 'is', which in normal circumstances unproblematically asserts being and/or identity in factual narrative, operates in a different way in fiction,<sup>29</sup> undergoing what might be called a sideways shift. Thus, compare:

[a] Baroness Thatcher is female

[b] Lobelia Sackville-Baggins is female.

Logically the predicates [a] and [b] are identical and perform the same function, since logic is concerned with the relation of concepts (Understanding) rather than with their viridical evaluation. The copula functions in [b] in what might be termed an hypothetical, or fictive, mode, operating with the reader's understanding that whatever it governs within a fiction is to be understood as analogous to the actual and no more. The Secondary world is permitted temporarily to usurp the position of the Primary on the understanding that whatever is asserted within the fiction is true for that Secondary world only, and would be the case *if, and only if, the Secondary world were real*. This is the basic assumption of any act of reading fiction,<sup>30</sup> and is able to function psychologically because a part of the mind, as noted earlier, never loses the ability to distinguish between the sense data of the actual world and the hyletic material of the text, on the latter of which it must exercise an interpretive function according to an understood code (the alphabet and language), even though this knowledge is repressed from full consciousness during reading to facilitate Secondary belief.

Thus a spectrum of qualitative belief may be charted, ranging from primary belief in the world around us, through textual accounts of the same, through historical belief (i.e. that William I prevailed at Hastings in 1066) which is empirically verifiable only to a limited degree, through to the Secondary belief in fiction.

But yet another form of belief must be taken into consideration, one of the utmost importance; what is the

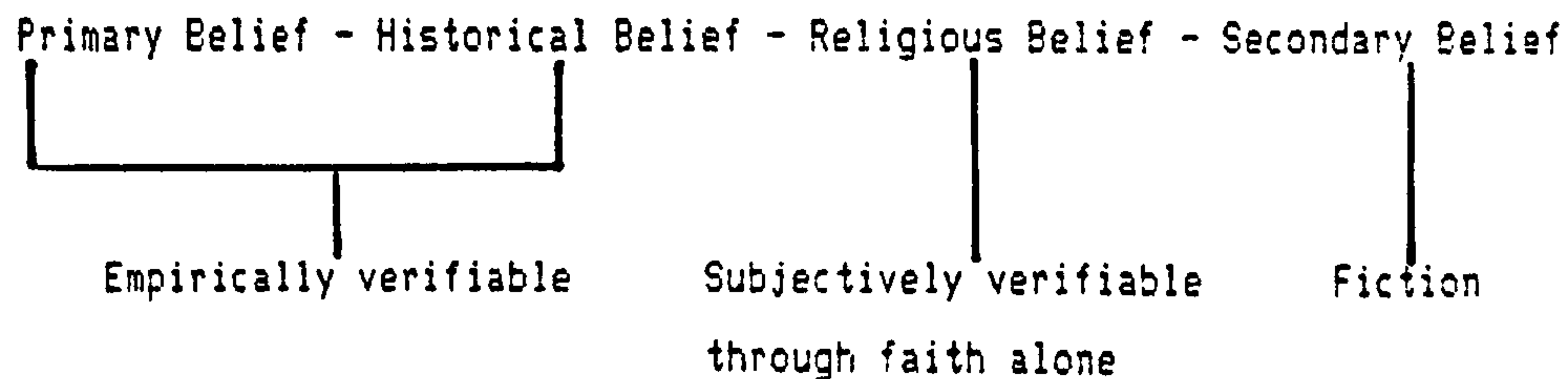


metaphysical status of religious belief? Clearly it must be of a very different nature to Primary belief, which is, or at least seems to be, empirically verifiable, and yet it is essential to separate it from Secondary belief, which would reduce any religious proposition to the status of fiction. The question is a particularly relevant one to our enquiry, since it is upon a series of religious beliefs that Tolkien's entire poetics is based.

I said in my discussion of *Escape* that another species of mystery could be determined within the process of Judgement and religious propositions serve to illustrate the point. I am postulating the kind of mystery that is perceived and understood and yet defies conventional judgement. Such would surely constitute a higher form of mystery than that which Lonergan describes in his account of Divine Love, since it engages the Self at a higher level. Religious speculation usually takes a form that crystallizes experience into a proposition that is metaphorical in nature. For example, the proposition that '*God made the world*' is a conceptual statement derived from subjective experience (internalized or otherwise). The reader, so long as he is not perverse enough to cling to the outmoded doctrine of the logical positivists, is capable of understanding this statement but only as a metaphorical expression. The meaning of the word 'made' is obviously not identical with the meaning of the same word in the statement '*Archibald made a model aeroplane*'. Archibald no doubt started off with a few pieces of balsa wood and employed glue and tools in the making process, whereas God's making of the world, whether *ex nihilo* or not, was surely comparable in no way to Archibald's act of making except through the broadest of metaphors. The predicate 'made' can only be understood analogously since its subject, 'God', is by definition ultimately unknowable. Yet metaphorically or not, the proposition '*God made the world*' is understood; it does make conceptual sense, however ill-defined those concepts may be. The mystery enters at the Judgement phase when we find that, since only one component of the metaphor is known to us, we are quite unable to

evaluate the proposition. The Judgement process is forced to yield to a unique form of unverifiable belief: faith.

We must make room for religious belief in our Qualitative Spectrum of Belief, inserting it between those forms which are capable of some verification and fictive Secondary belief which requires none.



Tolkien manages the sub-creation of his secondary world so well that he achieves a subtle shift to the left along this spectrum. His texts, while of course remaining fiction, incline towards the religious in the quality of belief which they inspire. This is achieved by his manipulation of language and imagery, which he revitalizes by re-mythologizing it, achieving something of the conceptual unity of the language of the Bible, a claim which shall form the nucleus of discussion in Chapters Four and Five.

#### iv) Consolation

The Consolation process is in many ways the most problematic of the three, and once again, Dr Deyo does not make matters easy for us. 'Eucatastrophe of faith' is how he links the concept of Consolation with Lonergan's Dialectic phase. This is a perfectly adequate gloss of Tolkien's concept, which is hardly surprising, since 'eucatastrophe' is Tolkien's own coinage to describe Consolation.<sup>31</sup> It signifies a species of peripeteia common to Fairy Tales, the 'happy ending' that comes unlooked for. What this can have to do with the process whereby one uses the information collected in the three preceding phases to decide on



a proper course of action, as Lonergan describes, is far from being immediately obvious. For Lonergan this phase is that by which data about our environment is converted into a conscious active response to it, and is therefore the seat of responsibility, the ethical sense, and the highest perceptual function of Man.

However, in considering Consolation, Tolkien does relate the process specifically to a religious context. The Gospel story, he says, is a classic fairy tale in form and content, the only difference between it and, say, the tales of the Grimm brothers being that the Gospels are true, a fairy tale that actually happened. As such, they serve as a paradigm for the genre, as well as pointedly making the link between the fairy story and the spiritual. Within this context the Resurrection functions first as the eucatastrophe of the Gospels, the happy ending that comes against all hope. Even Jesus, in the Synoptics' account, in the run up to and during the crucifixion seems to doubt a fortunate outcome, first in Gethsemane;

*And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: but nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. 32*

and even more pointedly, on the cross;

*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 33*

Against all rational expectation, the resurrection functions as a traditional fairy tale eucatastrophe to the Gospels, but it is more than that. By virtue of the unique historical/cosmological nature of the events described, the Resurrection also signals the eucatastrophe of Fallen Man himself, according to Tolkien's theology, making possible a

redemptive transcendence of our lapsed nature. In this context Consolation may be seen as the most theological of the three R/E/C processes, as its operation in other fairy tales or fantasies becomes an analogue of the experience of the joy felt at the mythologem of the redemption of man.

Yet the problem remains of how this principle may be related to Lonergan's concept of ethical dialectic. I would venture to suggest that the necessary bridge may be found in the religious writings of Søren Kierkegaard. In his longest work, *Either/Or*<sup>34</sup>, he describes and dramatizes what he sees as the two principal modes of existence, the æsthetic and the ethical. By æsthetic he specifically intends the man who lives a life dominated by immediate and sensory experience; St. Paul's 'life in the flesh'. This of course is the starting point for us all, but man is a synthesis of dualities, the temporal and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite; the æsthetic existence recognizes only the temporal, the physical and the finite. At some point in his life, the æsthetic may feel the inner promptings of the eternal asserting its claim on him. Until this is recognized it will manifest itself in the form of *Angst*, or Dread, which can only be overcome by a conscious renunciation of the unfulfilling pleasures of immediacy. Thus we can see the either/or decision of Kierkegaard's title locating itself in Lonergan's fourth heuristic process; the immediate experience of the senses, having been understood and judged, must submit to a conscious decision as to their worth to pass to the ethical mode of existence.

But how may a man choose the ethical life except by renunciation, which involves entering into a negative relationship with the world. This is the question Kierkegaard takes up in *Fear and Trembling*,<sup>35</sup> in which he uses the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to develop his theory of faith. It is through faith in the resurrection of Christ that Tolkien believes man can share in the eucatastrophe of the Gospels, and be raised above his fallen nature. But that resurrection, as we have noted, came against all rational expectation; to have

believed in its likelihood before the event would have been to accept the *absurd*, one of Kierkegaard's key terms. Abraham had been promised by God that through Isaac he should become the father of nations as numerous as the sands of the shore, but yet God orders him to sacrifice the child through which the prophecy is to be fulfilled. Abraham's obedience, according to Kierkegaard does not involve any renunciation of Isaac, since he firmly believes that God will return the boy to him in this life, despite the fact that such a restoration is against all human reason and possibility. He is prepared to believe, in fact, in the absurd, and this is what constitutes his faith. Kierkegaard describes this as 'the double movement to infinity'; a renunciation removes the subject from an æsthetic dependency on the world, but simultaneous belief in the absurd, that all things are possible to God, restores him to a positive relation with the world. This thought seems to be behind Tolkien's elven-king Finrod's distinction between *amdir*, the hope that is "*the expectation of good, which though uncertain has some foundation in what is known*", and the greater quality of *estel*, "*another [hope] which is founded deeper...that is 'trust' [specifically in Eru, or God] It is not defeated by the ways of the world, for it does not come from experience, but from our nature and first being*", (i.e. their origin as the *Eruhíni*, the Children of God.)

Thus we can see that the Consolation felt by Tolkien's reader involves an acceptance of the absurd that enables the eucatastrophe; the ultimate decision of this type is that which accepts the absurdity of the resurrection, i.e. faith. We see, then, that Deyo was correct in glossing Consolation as 'eucatastrophe of faith'. This decision involves the bringing to bear of a new phenomenon in the Lonerganian chain of the senses on the information collected, understood and judged, namely the ethical sense, and this is the ultimate function of the Dialectic phase. There is nothing in Lonergan's argument that says the decision made at this point must be a rational one. Indeed the very nature of faith invalidates reason as a part of the decision-making process, and I shall argue in Chapter Three of



the current study that the language and conceptual basis of the ethical is at best irrelevant, and at worst, inimical, to those of reason.

The R/E/C processes may be viewed then in their narrower sense to describe the 'surface reaction' of the reader to Fairy Stories. Recovery amounts to a Mooreeffocian 'freshness of vision', Escape is simply a pleasant manner of passing an evening without worrying about the problems of the real world, and Consolation constitutes the pleasure we all take at a happy ending. But beneath these reactions, as we have suggested, deeper and more wide ranging processes may be at work, which are closely bound up with our religious instincts. These are played out in the arena of Modern Man's deeply rooted conviction of his alienation from nature and from a sense of the lack of presence of the Numinous, and of his earnest desire to achieve a sense of belonging, of identity with his surroundings and his inner self. This anxiety finds mythic expression in the myth of the Fall of Man and in the Christian promise of Redemption, and it is to this end that Recovery, Escape and Consolation work to their fullest capacity. If I seem to be overstepping the mark in implying that the reaction of a reader to Tolkienian fantasy is capable of impelling him at least part of the way towards redemption, it is precisely because that was Tolkien's own view, cherished over many years.<sup>36</sup> In the Epilogue to On Fairy Stories he argues that any sub-creator, even a fantasist, likes to think that there is a quality of reality in his Secondary world, a point where Secondary and Primary flow into each other, even if their details are quite unlike.<sup>37</sup> For this reason he constantly stress the importance of the integrity of the sub-created world. The joy one would feel if it could be demonstrated that even the tritest fairy tale was true would, he claims, be qualitatively identical with the joy occasioned by the eucatastrophe. This joy, or *evangelium*, "has the very taste of primary truth", it "looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is



unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe". The Consolation of the story functions as a prefigurement of the Salvation of Man.

## NOTES : CHAPTER ONE

1. Tolkien; Introduction to Sir Gawain & the Green Knight/Pearl/Sir Orfeo p.2
2. Tolkien: On Fairy Stories, in Essays Presented to Charles Williams, ed. C.S.Lewis, pp.38-89. My quotations are taken from the reprinting in the second edition of Tree and Leaf (Unwin 1988)
3. *ibid*
4. Bernard Lonergan: Method in Theology, 2nd ed. (London 1973)
5. Steven Mark Deyo: Once Upon a Time, Once Upon a Parsec, in Mythos, Vol.I:11-12, Nov.1983
6. *ibid*
7. Lonergan, *op.cit.* p.107
8. Tolkien: 'Mythopoeia', in On Fairy Stories, pp.50-51; the poem's full text, of which O.F.S. quotes but a part, is now available in Tree and Leaf, 2nd ed.'88
9. Lonergan, p.101
10. Tolkien O.F.S. p.44
11. S.T.Coleridge: Biographia Literaria, Ch.xiii
12. *ibid*
13. George Berkeley: The Principles of Human Knowledge, §I
14. Deyo's misquote for Coleridge's phrase 'willing suspension of disbelief'; Tolkien quotes Coleridge accurately.
15. See On Fairy Stories.
16. See § Recovery.
17. *ibid*
18. *ibid* p.46
19. *ibid* p.55
20. *ibid* pp.55-62
21. *ibid* p.59
22. *ibid* p.61
23. *ibid* p.51
24. Owen Barfield highlights a very similar perceptual

distinction to Lonergan's, though with a differing emphasis; his term for what Lonergan calls Understanding is *figuration*, the conceptualising of bald sense data. (Barfield's *Saving the Appearances*.) See Note 24 below. Also, see Chapter Three for Barfield's influence on Tolkien's own thought.

25. Barfield's equivalent to Lonergan's Judgement is divided into two categories; *alpha-thinking* and *beta-thinking*. The ontologically evaluative process which Lonergan confines to Judgement is in fact the ground for Barfield's whole study (*Saving the Appearances* pp.24-5), examining the relation of appearance and 'reality'. Alpha-thinking is that mental activity that relates perceived objects to each other, a function Lonergan would place in his Intellectual, or Understanding, phase. Tolkien's sub-created Secondary World would be firmly grounded here in its fictive sense. Beta-thinking, however, does coincide with Lonergan in relating the perceived object to the perceiving mind, a self-reflexive function which does indeed involve a judgement as to the relation of the appearance with objective reality. Bearing in mind Tolkien's preoccupation with the nature of Man's fallen perception, this would be the operative ground for his 'serious purpose'.
26. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories* p.53
27. *ibid* p.19
28. Richard Adams: *Watership Down*, Penguin.
29. G.Aichele: *The Limits of Story*
30. Roman Ingarden offers a closely argued model of the reading experience, postulating that the objects of fiction are located neither in the actual world, nor the ideal (cf. Plato and Aristotle), but in an intermediate region defined by both. The fictional objectives of a concept are established by its 'intentionality', which determines the status of objects of fiction by achieving an ontic modification - the copula undergoes just such a sideways shift as argued above. Therefore, in asserting 'X is Y', the 'is' neither asserts (existence), nor is it neutral. It simply functions in a

different manner, making 'illusions' of its objects, wherein the 'illusion' signifies neither ontically transcendent nor non-existent. Ingarden argues that the truth-value ascribed to such a modified, fictional, copula is necessarily a quasi-judgement, and there are an infinite number of quasi-levels within what Tolkien calls the Secondary world, all 'borrowed' from the intentional meanings of the author's words.

But since fiction effects a 'substitution' for the real, it involves a duality of content and context, which the Primary world does not. A fictional object, unlike an actual object which possesses an infinitude of properties, is limited and finite. It always involves 'spots of indeterminacy' and consists of general determinants. Fiction therefore both reveals and conceals its object - it conceals its finitude, its fictionality - which brings Ingarden to the crux of his thesis:

*We can say that, with regard to the determination of the objectivities represented within it, every literary work is in principle incomplete, and always in need of further supplementation; in the terms of the text, however, the supplementation can never be complete.*

[Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art p.251]

The supplementation, beyond the text, that completes the 'determination of the objectivities' is the action of its being read. The reader brings to each concept an infinite range of associations, of connotive meanings, thereby fleshing out the limited properties of the intended object and disguising its fictionality. The heuristic dimension of Tolkien's æsthetic theory requires that at least the main thrust of Ingarden's reception thesis be admitted, since room must be left for the reader to participate in the fantasy: after all, not everyone can be a writer of fiction.

31. Tolkien, *op.cit*, p.62

32. Gospel of St Matthew (A.V.), XXXVI:36. (Luke XXII:42



corresponds)

33. Gospel of St Mark (A.V.), XV:34

34. Kierkegaard: Either/Or, 2 vols., ed. & trans. H.V.Hong & E.H.Hong, Princeton

35. Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, trans. A. Hannay, p.54

36. At least, that is, until the last years of his life, when there is evidence that he was effected by a dark sense of doubt, ranging beyond his æsthetic theories to the foundation of his very faith..

37. Tolkien, op.cit. p.64

## CHAPTER TWO:

### A MYTHIC GRAMMAR

In the last chapter we observed the wide-ranging principle emerge that language for Tolkien contained the potential to bridge the abyss between man and the rest of creation, to overcome the isolating distinction of subject and object. Sub-creation, as a primary activity, imaginatively interposes itself between Man and the fallen world to which he relates as does subject to object. But from a religious point of view, the ultimate relationship into which man may enter is not that with Creation, but that with Creator. Most theologies have traditionally portrayed man's relation to God as a subjective one, and from an existential view point, this view is entirely sustainable. But man wants to make a greater claim for the existence of God than that which makes all knowledge of Him dependent on the individual. A kind of transcendent objectivity is thus attributed to God; transcendent in that it cannot be known, except subjectively. Therefore, any movement that language might accomplish towards nullifying the subject-predicate division must bring man closer to God, or at least, to intensify the perceived bond between the self and God; either of which amounts, in Christian terms, to a redemptive action. Language in such circumstances would become an operative function (though not necessarily the exclusive operative function) of Grace. This constitutes a transcendence of the sense of isolation that modern man finds in himself, his disjunction from the natural environment and from God, an isolation that is dramatized by the Myth of the Fall. In this chapter I wish to discuss the Romantic linguistic tradition of which this myth plays a key part, and in which Tolkien himself

was consciously working. This tradition, of the one-time existence of a natural, unfallen language, and the possibility of creatively recovering something of its power to reunite subject and object, signifier and signified, underlies Tolkien's literary endeavours, and I shall examine some of the ways he reacted to problems raised by the tradition, in his belief that, through sub-creation, man could re-mythologize language to attain an integrated perception of his surroundings, which is ultimately to say, of God.

The feasibility of language proving to possess such a profound potential seems less remote when we recall that man's sense of isolation from the rest of creation is almost certainly a result of language itself. To this extent, it has been argued that 'the Fall of Man' should properly be regarded as a linguistic, rather than a metaphysical event. Language, that is, in what Frye calls the demotic mode, which has prevailed and conditioned our response to our environment for the last three hundred years; the descriptive language of modern science in which we find "a clear separation of subject and object, in which the subject exposes itself, in sense experience, to the impact of the objective world." Any genuine sense of self-being is withdrawn from the syntax, and confined to a perfunctory first-person pronoun. No identification is permitted between the speaker and the spoken, which is permitted to relate only to the intended object. Indeed, in its purest form, that of, say, the scientific treatise, the first person is invariably replaced with the further-distancing impersonality of the third person 'one'. The intention is to promote the distance between observer and observed in the belief that that way lies the way of discovering how the observed works. The mechanical model of the Newtonian universe carried with it the implication that everything was ultimately explicable in terms of simple cause and effect, and the way to discover the nature of any object was to observe it dispassionately and note all changes. Now this materialist doctrine was certainly a way of collecting information about the

world, but it was not the only way. Alternative Weltanschauung existed, but materialism gained the ascendancy during the eighteenth century, seeing off its rivals and affirming itself the only genuinely heuristic method with Auguste Comte's propounding of his doctrine of positivism. Thereafter language functioned increasingly as an objectifying process. However, as Barfield points out, "a proposition that only one method of scientific investigation is possible, cannot itself (except for devout believers) be based on scientific investigation by that method. The proposition is, therefore, a dogmatic belief: although it has been so thoroughly absorbed into the thought stream of Western humanity that it has come to be regarded, not as a dogma, but as a scientifically established fact." <sup>2</sup> As observed in the previous chapter, any totally closed system may affirm whatever it likes without fear of contradiction from without, but nevertheless must not expect to exert any influence or authority outside its own terms.

It may be questioned how far consciousness is conditioned by changes in the function of language, or indeed, might it not be the case that language is made to perform differently by an alteration in conscious perception? (By 'perception' I intend the wider process of conceptualisation, rather than the limited sense of 'reception of sense data' as Lonergan uses the term.) The question is one which implies that priority can be attributed to either language or consciousness; which came first, the Word or the Concept? But the problem is far from being clear cut. Certainly it is difficult to imagine a word existing before its related concept; whether such an utterance would even be a word is open to doubt, it having no more meaning than the cave man's grunt or the baby's yawl, though it is difficult to see how Rousseau's cherished notion of a natural, 'pure' language that was intrinsically emotive could have amounted to much more than this.

. Such considerations quite reasonably impel critics like Tyler to conclude that meaning precedes phonology and syntax,<sup>3</sup> but it is important to realise that it cannot precede language by very much. In order to move beyond the simplest naming of objects to



any kind of reflective consciousness a highly sophisticated language system must be acquired with the requisite logical infrastructure for the formulation and connection of concepts. Conversely language itself forms a self-reflexive closed unit into which it ought to be impossible to break from without, yet this theory is forced to yield to the paradoxical fact that virtually every child manages to do just that in learning its native tongue.

This suggests that developments of language and of consciousness advance hand in hand, in a kind of see-saw motion. Let me attempt an illustrative model. A baby perceives an object; he experiences sense data that we would recognize as redness and roundness, though of course the child is incapable of attaching such meaning to these immediate experiences. The parent repeats the word 'apple' while indicating the object; the child hears but as yet the conjunction of noise (the word) and object (the apple) is arbitrary. He looks again at the object and again the parent repeats the word. Now a referential relation begins to take shape in the child's mind; the noise 'apple' has become a name, but as yet only the name of that particular object and no other. Next day the child's grandmother shows him a different apple; this one is green and much larger, definitely not the apple of yesterday, but the name 'apple' is again spoken. The word compels the child to compare and contrast the two fruits, and new forms of consciousness begin to develop. The ability to abstract common qualities and identify dissimilarities lead to the capacities of generalization, particularization, identification and relational evaluation; concepts of genera and species become possible, all because of the consideration of two previously unconnected objects linked by one word. Without any linguistic input there is no capacity for cognitive thought; the infant's surroundings remain an undifferentiated chaos of sensory bombardment, but it is one in which the child can hardly feel uncomfortable. In this condition he can make no distinction between himself and any object he might happen to see, touch, hear or smell. The world and himself are one manifold of

experience.

This model of the infant coming to terms with language and expanding consciousness serves to summarize what Tolkien saw as the actual development of language and its cognate consciousness, from earliest times to the present, with the proviso that the earliest phase of language, the mythological, would differ from the infant's experience of undifferentiated sensory stimulation in that its users would include mature adults with fully developed mental capacities. The difference between such men and ourselves would be that their mental faculties would be developed in quite different directions. There would be no room for any smug sense of our own superiority in any comparison with men whom biologists classify, like ourselves, as *Homo sapien sapien*, men with an average intelligence identical with that of the present day, their alternative quality of consciousness notwithstanding. Thus we find ourselves, products of our demotic language every bit as much as its generators, cut off from a thorough understanding of our ancestors' mode of consciousness and thereby from their world. (I shall return to the nature of the mythic consciousness in the following chapter.)

This disjunction has long been recognised. // Giambattista Vico began what amounts to the Romantic tradition of fallen language with his division of language into three cyclic phases; the poetic, the heroic and the vulgar.<sup>4</sup> True to the correlation between the operative mode of language and consciousness of surroundings, Vico attributes respective social patterns to each phase. The earliest phase, with which my argument is most concerned, was that which gave rise to the Summarian and Babylonian myth cycles, the Egyptian and Hittite mythologies, the pre-Platonic Hellenic myths along with all accounts of mystery rites and ceremonial procedures, as well as the raw material of Eddas of the peoples of the North. // The poetic phase is usually cognate with a bardic, or pre-literate society,, since, the written word, as Derrida has continually stressed, is much further removed from any sense of Presence, so we can expect that the material of the above mythologies had been firmly established in

the poetic phase even though it was not recorded until society had passed into the second, the heroic, phase. An example of this may be found in the Icelandic Eddas, almost our sole documentary source for the religious beliefs of the Norsemen, which were first written down by christian monks some thousand years after the Scandinavian tribes settled the fjords; the equivalent of having no earlier sources for our knowledge of Christ, in the absence of any gospels and patristic writing, than writings dating from the tenth century A.D. What the original form of the myths was is almost impossible to guess; even allowing for the inevitable evolution they would have undergone during ten centuries, the meaning would almost certainly have been distorted by the changing consciousness of society, not least of which would have been the sudden and massive Viking expansion from the Scandinavian homeland and the movement from tribalism to a concept of nationhood, to say nothing of any ideological alteration that may have entered through the vetting of their christian recorders.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is that the deeply meaningful religious formulations of an earlier society devolve the fables and nursery stories of a later age. Northrop Frye has re-termed Vico's poetic phase the 'hieroglyphic',<sup>6</sup> which hints at the operative mode of this form of language; it is essentially what we, with our demotic sensibility, would call a metaphoric language that tends to the integration of subject with object. Unlike the pictogram, which represents an abstract representation of the object it denotes, the hieroglyph substitutes a recognizable picture of an object which is not identical with the object - usually a phoneme - that it denotes, except through the device of metaphor.

Vico's second phase, the heroic, or as Frye prefers, the hieratic, was inaugurated with the abstract philosophical discourses of Plato - and was perhaps never to be surpassed as an example of the operative mode of this phase. It functions analogically, involving the subject stepping outside of his discourse and engaging in a metalanguage such as finds its paradigm in classical Socratic irony.<sup>5b</sup> The third phase, the



vulgar, or demotic, language is both the product and regulator of the positivist world view as described above, and from which, like it or not, we cannot entirely escape - though such an Escape, as we shall see, was Tolkien's creative goal. Demotic language completes the disjunction between subject and object by implying an objectifying perspective. Being firmly grounded in the phenomenal world, metaphysical discourse becomes impossible since its propositions are neither analytic nor empirically verifiably synthetic. It was in attempting to treat poetic language according to the functions of the demotic that the logical positivists made their mistake. This provides us with a hint as to the relevancy of the poetic mode today; it is the language in which almost all discussion of religion, æsthetics and traditional ethics is firmly rooted. Problems inevitably arise when we seek to approach theological or æsthetic issues with our demotically conditioned consciousness, unless we have a clear view that the form in which we have inherited these issues is essentially mythological. Barfield goes even further, in asserting that, since "there is usually little connection between the physical causes of a thing and its meaning",<sup>7</sup> demotic language is incapable of coming to terms with any *meaning* at all.

We are confronted then with two sharply contrasting forms of language and their respective world-views. The conventional progressive view might be expected to value most highly the contemporary demotic mode, which is, after all, responsible for almost all the benefits modern society has to offer, and indeed such is the view of the materialists. And yet there is a long and remarkable tradition that maintains that the earlier, poetic language is much more than the primitive *Weltanschauung* that the materialists would have us believe. It is the ground for a proper understanding of all our spiritual values, analysis of which has constantly vexed the positivist and neo-positivist philosophers of the current century.

I have spoken, as does Frye, of language passing through three temporal phases, but of course the poetic mode, along with the analogical, is an important part of speech as we use it



today. Similarly the Summarian during the period of the composition of the Gilgamesh Epic were also keeping meticulous domestic accounts and business records in cuneiform, an unromantic action that required the coldly objective outlook of the demotic mode. All three modes are capable of existing simultaneously, and when the speaker switches from one form of language to another, from a discussion of the weather to an account of a mystery rite, for example, the human mind is quite capable of switching its responses to accommodate the change, probably without the faintest awareness that any change has taken place. However, in any given age one of the three modes will dominate the others, and broadly speaking they can be demonstrated as falling into the sequence set down by Vico. The dominant language mode, as we have seen, will determine the dominant mode of consciousness. Two traditional ways may be discerned of reacting to each of the two kinds of language : the objective, or demotic response, and the creative, or poetic response. (for my current purposes I leave aside the analogical, as merely an intermediate stage between the two, or rather a proto-phase of the demotic.)

The objective response goes back to Aristotle, with his distinction in the *Poetics* between the language of poetry and the language of history. For all his argument is couched in the objective terms of philosophy, he comes down firmly on the side of the poetic: having on one hand claimed that the difference between poetic and historical truth does not lie in the fact that one is written in verse and the other in prose, and thereby apparently ruling out the possibility that merely two kinds of syntax are being used, he proceeds with his famous assertion that the poet is more philosophical than the historian because "while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts."<sup>3</sup> The respective objects of the two forms have therefore metaphysically different status and we must conclude that their respective languages are functioning in a different manner. It is true that "the works of Herodotus might be put into verse, and in this metrical form it would be no less

a kind of history than it is without metre,"<sup>9</sup> but there is more to poetic language than metre alone. Similar conclusions were reached by Robert Lowth, who argued that Hebrew poetry translates to maximum poetic effect into prose rather than Western verse forms and gave rise to the Romantic realisation that there was no essential difference between poetry and prose so long as their subject was the same.<sup>10</sup> Versification alone, no matter how skilfully accomplished, would not turn Herodotus into poetry; on the other hand, if a poet took Herodotus and used him metaphorically to draw attention to some truth of the human condition, making the doings of Pericles of relevance to us all, then the crevasse has been leaped; history becomes poetry, even if rendered in prose. Its objective historical reference becomes as irrelevant to the work as an æsthetic unit as the biographical details of castaway Alexander Selkirk are to a reading of Robinson Crusoe, the poet having a 'serious purpose' that goes far beyond the mere catalogue of items that constitute the tale. The language of history, being concerned with objective particulars, is of course the language of science, functioning chiefly in the metonymic mode which stresses the priority of context; poetic language, being metaphorical, universalizes its assertions by abolishing context. Indeed this abolition is essential, according to Tolkien's doctrine of sub-creation, since failure to do so would allow them to obtrude into the Secondary world as incongruous fragments of the Primary, shattering the inner world's integrity.<sup>11</sup> It was for this reason that Tolkien could never accept the presence of Father Christmas in Lewis' The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, since he carried with him a manifold of discordant associations with St. Nicholas, the Christian Church, modern day Christmas celebrations, all aspects of this world that have no place in that of Narnia.<sup>12</sup>

The contemporary relevance of these two modes of language has been commented upon by Peter Baelz, who, speaking of theological discourse on the nature of Christ, claims that "we must indeed use two languages, the one human and historical, the other divine and mythological, each with its own distinction and

logic."<sup>13</sup> As Prickett points out, this claim that each language must have its own distinctive logic, by which 'logic' implies not merely an *a priori* system of reasoning, but a fundamentally different species of reason, is to acknowledge the difference in human attitude and response to these respective kinds of language. Mythic language, with its metaphoric functions and non-realist conceits, is in the positivist sense a non-cognitive construct, but as Baelz indicates, its propositions are not, as A.J. Ayer and his followers would have it, meaningless. Its meaning is of a qualitatively different nature from that of demotic speech; the rationale of meaning is re-invented in the poetic.

This brings me to the second kind of response to the two modes of language; the creative, the group into which Tolkien falls, as we shall see. From the artist's perspective there is much to be said for translating the anthropological transition from the dominance of poetic consciousness to the dominance of the objective into the metaphorical form of myth. Within the Judeo/Christian tradition, this translation to metaphor takes the form of the Myth of the Fall, in which poetic language becomes the Adamic language, of natural rather than conventional origin. Other cultures have evolved equivalent myths of separation of subject and object, c.f. the Platonic myth of Zeus' punishing disobedient Man by bisecting his original eight limbed, two-headed body.<sup>14</sup> It is hard to believe that the attractiveness of the poetic world-view is not largely conditioned by the myth of the Fall, wherein we find the poetic, pre-lapsarian language constantly associated with innocence and paradise. The story of Adam's naming of the animals clearly illustrates the integration between subject and object:

*And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living thing that was the name thereof."*<sup>15</sup>



The animals are created 'out of the ground', as is Adam, from the *adamah*, the dust. Being of the same substance as the lesser creatures, an affinity therefore exists between Adam and the beast which allows him to instinctively perceive their essential nature. The name he gives to each is no arbitrary Saussurian attribution, but has a necessary connection with the object denoted: 'that was the name thereof'. The tradition of the 'onomathaic' Adamic language was well established by the first century A.D., where we find Philo of Alexandria glossing the Genesis account;

*For the native reasoning power in [Adam's] soul being still unalloyed, and no infirmity or disease or evil affection having intruded itself, he received the impressions made by bodies and objects in their sheer reality, and the titles he gave were fully apposite, for right well did he divine the character of the creatures he was describing, with the result that their natures were apprehended as soon as their names were uttered. '6*

Adam is here credited with full consciousness, his God-given 'reason' being what is being put to the test. Reason, as we would understand it, would seem to objectify the beasts and thereby separate subject from object, but leaves us in no doubt that, as Adam's reason is unpolluted, so it exists in perfect harmony with his environment. Philo, not having had the benefit of modern philological discoveries pertaining to language development, attributes the analogical mode of rational consciousness to Adam, whereas we might prefer the term 'intuitive consciousness', an equally valid form according to Jung, which neatly avoids the distancing problem of rational thought. Intuition, furthermore, is more easily reconciled with the phrase 'he received the impressions made by bodies and objects in their sheer reality', an absolutism that no-one since Kant has been able to believe is attainable through Reason. We might bear in mind, however, that Philo is probably here using the term Reason as a cognate for



Logos. Leibniz also seems to intend it in this sense when he argues an early Romantic case for a theistic concept of sub-creation:

*Rational minds are images of the creator himself, the divine author of nature. Rational minds are capable of knowing the system of the universe and to some extent imitating it by architectonic patterns. Every rational mind is, as it were, a little divinity in its own department.*<sup>17</sup> (My emphasis)

We might also recall Tolkien's insistence that the making of fantasy is essentially a rational pursuit.<sup>18</sup> Philo immediately follows his aforequoted passage, rather pointedly, with the comment;

*So greatly did he excel in all noble traits, thus attaining the very limit of human happiness.*<sup>19</sup>

Philo, at least, is in no doubt that the Adamic integration with the environment was a state of blessedness, but by the time his *De Opificio Mundi* came to be written, the possibility of a language that somehow 'rhymed' with the essence of the objects it denotes had long since been thoroughly debated in the Hellenic world. The Heraclitian school regarded words as a fulcrum on which coeval opposites maintained their equilibrium,<sup>20</sup> and the debate was taken up by Plato himself in the *Cratylus*, in which a mimetic theory of natural language is presented by Cratylus which seeks to relate the phonemes of words to their meaning.<sup>21</sup> Thus λ, a front palatal with a smooth, liquid pronunciation, characterises words pertaining to smoothness and sliding motion; e.g. λικυς = clear, sharp, piercing, shrill (of sound); λιπαρον = sleek, oily, shining; λισσας = a smooth, bare cliff. Ν, an internalised nasal, characterizes words concerned with inwardness and enclosedness, such as νοϋς = mind, or νοιω = to dwell in, to inhabit, while sibilant σ, ϕ and ψ signify hissing or blowing; σπηξ

= a wasp, and  $\phi\epsilon\nu\delta\omicron\nu\eta$  = a slingshot. The theory in its original extreme form maintains that all names must be true names, since any false name that does not imitate its referent will be a meaningless sound, 'like the noise of hammering on a brazen pot'. It is, however, unpicked by Socrates, whose very dialectic method depends on his ability to distinguish between true and false terms;  $\lambda\iota\gamma\upsilon\varsigma$  may indeed contain the smooth lamda, but it also contains the hard guttural gamma which seems to have little to do with the concept of a clear, sharp sound.<sup>21\*</sup> Alternatively we can look to words like  $\sigma\phi\upsilon\pi\alpha$  which exhibits two sibilants, sigma and phi, as well as the dynamic rho, but means 'an implement of husbandry, a beetle, a mallet for breaking clods of earth'<sup>22</sup> But neither is Socrates sympathetic to the the counter-argument of Hermogenes, who insists that all names are arbitrary in origin, being determined entirely by social convention.

The natural language banner was then taken up by the Epicureans and finds its next full exposition in Lucretius, who shifts ground from the mimetic theory to an expressive one, arguing that names arise spontaneously out of man's inner nature in response to his surroundings.<sup>23</sup> Rather than imitating the object denoted, language expresses the human subjective response to it. It will be noted that, although the Lucretian concept retains 'naturalness' as a criterion for the origin of language, some room it left for conscious artifice and a gap has therefore opened between subject and object. The Church's approach to natural language was much less concerned with the probable details of its linguistic functions, but rather with the theological implications of such a language. Aquinas returned the debate to the event of Adam's naming of the animals, arguing that because 'names are owing to the nature of things' (*'nomina autem debent naturis rerum congruere'*),<sup>24</sup> Adam must have had total knowledge of all the animals and 'by that reasoning, known of all other things' (*'pari ratione habuit omnium aliorum scientiam'*), which is to say that as Adam was the pinnacle of Creation, his knowledge was commensurate with the whole of Creation.

The postulated Adamic language was therefore seen by its adherents as a the key to a full understanding of nature, and the belief that traces of this pristine tongue could still be discerned in modern languages - or in the case of Boehme, modern languages themselves through a process of revelation such as that afforded to the Apostles at Pentecost, which would take the form of an instinctual, natural language that he terms 'sensualistic speech' - seemed to offer at least a remote prospect of a regaining of paradise; a re-creation of the original *Ur-Sprache*, in which there is "a complete, point-to-point mapping of language onto the true substance and shape of things".<sup>25</sup> Frederick the Great identified the Adamic language with Hebrew, and notoriously shut up a group of infants and deprived them of hearing a human voice in the expectation that, if not exposed to examples of modern language, they would revert naturally to the Hebrew tongue. This whole tradition was of course familiar to Tolkien, but as a disciplined philologist could hardly take on board most of its highly fanciful claims. As a mythographer, however, he was free to respond creatively to the concept of natural language. In a note on a discussion of the philological origins of various words for 'holy', he indicates that, while professionally he espouses the view that modern language is conventional rather than natural, this in no way undermines the importance of the poetic:

*a single word in human language (unlike Entish) is a short-hand sign, & conventional. The fact that it is derived from a single facet, even if proved, does not prove that other facets were not equally present to the mind of the users of this conventional sign. The λόγος is ultimately independent of the verbum.*<sup>26</sup>

The equal validity of 'other facets' in effect implies metaphoric tropes; words may mean more than they literally - conventionally - say. In other words, the conventionality of language in no sense detracts from its poetic capacity. It is no



surprise, therefore, to see Tolkien introduce the concept of the Logos at this point, along with the creational connotations that the concept carries.

The term 'Adamic language' carries with it a host of mythological implication; along with its contingent state of mind, labelled, by the Christian tradition, Innocence, it is inseparable from the ensuing episodes of Man's Fall and expulsion from the Garden. The Genesis myth describes what is essentially a linguistic phenomenon, the Fall of Language itself. And since story may be accounted, in sub-creational terms, the highest function of language, Tolkien is in agreement with this position, commenting that

*there cannot be any 'story' without a fall - all stories are ultimately about the fall - at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.<sup>27</sup>*

The disjunction of subject and object, with its concomitant, the alienation of Man from the rest of Creation, is of increasing concern to contemporary linguistic and literary scholarship, all the more so since Saussure pointed out that the problem was considerably more difficult than had been realised; not only does 'fallen' demotic speech distance the subject from the objects he wishes to describe, but a much more fundamental gulf exists within language itself, separating signifier from signified. Not until the late 1960s however was the full calamity of our linguistic crisis realises, with Derrida damning us to an infinite and unresolvable oscillation between sign and interpretation. Tolkien was, then, capable of responding to the myth of the Fall on a linguistic level, though we must not lose sight of his Catholic sensibility. The Fall, with its full Judeo-Christian connotations of a separation of man from God, was just as real for him in its spiritual sense.<sup>28</sup> It hardly needs to be remarked upon that the religious temperament, like the political or any other that is conditioned by dogma, finds no difficulty in



maintaining belief in a proposition at several different levels of meaning at once. Conceding that Fantasy can be badly done or abused, that it may "even delude the minds out of which it came", Tolkien then proceeds to ask the question "*But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true?*"<sup>29</sup> Language may safely be accounted one of the most 'human things' of all, and is indeed fallen in Tolkien's opinion, as he indicates in what is significantly the nearest thing to a direct philological statement in *The Hobbit*:

*To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all. There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful.*<sup>30</sup>

We are left in no doubt that within Tolkien's fiction, the elven languages represent a tradition equivalent to the Primary world's Adamic language. The Noldorian elves, though fallen and in exile, still retain clear memories of their former bliss in Valinor. Indeed this state of bliss is still reflected in the greatest of the remaining Noldorian realms in exile, as Tolkien describes Frodo's reaction to Lothlórien in one of his best fictional expositions of the principle of recovery:

*It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful....no blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.*<sup>31</sup> [My emphasis]

We immediately notice Tolkien relating the fallen condition to the inadequacy of language, similarly fallen, to express Frodo's epiphanic recovery of vision; also that the names of the colours he sees seem 'new and wonderful'.

The elves characterize themselves linguistically by naming themselves the *Quendi*, 'those who speak with voices'. We are told that when the time came for the elves, the Firstborn of Ilúvatar, to awaken, "while they dwelled yet silent by Cuiviénan their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven".<sup>32</sup> Their immediate response is the exclamation *Ele!* (= *behold!*). "From this origin derived the ancient words *él* and *elen*, meaning 'star', and the adjectives *elda* and *elena*, meaning 'of the stars'".<sup>33</sup> From this comes the term *Eldar*, 'people of the stars', which the elves later use as a name for themselves. Tolkien is here using the Lucretian model of natural language; *ele!* expresses the spontaneous feeling of the elves on awakening. They have lain asleep in the secret valley of Cuiviénan until the time appointed for their awakening, and in this state they are indistinguishable from their natural surroundings. Neither the Valar, the angelic beings whose task is to shape the world, nor the fallen Melkor, who's servants regularly roam the dark places, have been able to discover their divinely ordained place of awakening. When they do awake, they become intuitively aware of their total integration with nature; 'they dwelt yet silent', while 'their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven', and 'the first sound that was heard was the sound of water flowing and the sound of water falling over stone'. The moment of the utterance *ele!* is at once the peak of their attunement with their environment and the beginning of their disjunction, for as Verlyn Flieger has noted;

*It is their first perception and their agent of separation, dividing the see-ers from the seen, and at the same time characterizing them by what they perceive and how they perceive it.*"<sup>34</sup>

Language in the Primary world also functions for Tolkien as 'perception and agent of separation'. It is both symptom and regulator of our fallen perception from which he intends sub-creation to allow us an escape. This must be done by a recovery of perception through the revitalizing of language, a renewal that is the function and duty of the poet/sub-creator. In effect he is outlining a redemptive poetics which takes upon itself the shape of the Christian myth of the Fall and of Redemption.

Michael Edwards has recently explored just such a possibility in his book *Towards a Christian Poetics*.<sup>35</sup> For Edwards also the Fall is largely a linguistic event, with its concomitant fall of the perceptive faculty. His thesis proposes a three part movement which may be discerned in Christian cosmology, history and theology, which he describes, borrowing his first two terms from Pascal, as:

grandeur > misère > redemption

or, in theological terms; Blessedness, Sin and Grace. This sequence may be applied to language also, its first component corresponding to the perfect unity of word and referent of the poetic phase, or mythologically speaking, the Adamic language. The second phase represents man's fallen condition, the isolation modern man feels from nature, from God, even from his own language. Psychology since Freud has, in a sense, worsened our lot, by removing even our certainty as to a unitary self. This, analogously, is the ambiguity of the Fallen language we have inherited, which, disjoined from the external world, shackles our mind in such a way as to prevent us ever fully comprehending reality. The third movement, the redemption of the Word, is presented as the goal and function of the writer, who must renew language for its own sake, and in doing so might achieve a means to glimpse the state of grace man as a whole must struggle towards. As Edwards has it,



We arrive after generations of shady complicity between language and the world, to find ourselves in an inextricable yet incongruous texture of word, self, things. The incongruity of language however is precisely our chance. The flaw between word and object, the flaws within words (the apartness of sound and sense for example), and the complex obscurities of meaning, impel the imagination. Explored, language becomes the domain of suggestions, fragments of a novel reality emerging with fragments of a novel speech. No longer blocking or clouding the issue but pushing relentlessly at a multivariety of unexpected doors, contradiction and ambiguity change."<sup>36</sup>

Here then is a scholar in full agreement with Tolkien on the redemptive potential of language, and prepared to accept a linguistic interpretation of the Fall. I say a linguistic interpretation since legion others may doubtlessly be constructed, but for the purpose of this study I offer the following gloss:

The spoken word in the first chapters of *Genesis* is immediate and unproblematic. Such an Adamic language is held to possess an inherent power over that which it denotes, since a name is held to share in the essence of its object. For this reason we find the concept of the fiat a central one in Judeo-Christian Creation narratives.<sup>37</sup> And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. The word itself is sufficient to constitute the creative act<sup>38</sup> because, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the annunciation of the Fiat is the actualization of the divine creative principle of the Logos.

The same pattern is apparent in Tolkien's Creation myth, wherein we find Ilúvatar, the All-Father, commanding the Ainur, 'the offspring of his thoughts', to create a great music.<sup>39</sup> Three themes are propounded by him and developed by the Ainur, until each is distorted by the discords of Melkor, the prototype individualist who strives to create *ex nihilo*, refusing to accept the premise that "all things have there uttermost source in [Ilúvatar]".<sup>40</sup> The themes are finally resolved in an harmony of



sublime sorrow, after which Ilúvatar shows the Ainur a vision of their music, which has the form of Arda, the World. With the word *Eä!* Let these things Be, he gives the vision actuality and the world comes into being. The fiat, *Eä!* is but the articulation that gives actualization to the Music, which represents the Logos. Indeed one of the manifold meanings of the term *λογος* is 'divine harmony', a point I shall have more to say on in Chapter Three.

Language within Eden continues without problems with the intuitive naming of the animals. The act of naming was always one close to Tolkien's heart, as Shippey has emphasized:

*Like a goldfish in a weedy pool, the theme that flashes from much of Tolkien's work is that of the identity of man and nature, of namer and named. It was probably his strongest belief, stronger even than his Catholicism (though of course he hoped that at some level the two were reconciled). It was what drove Tolkien to write.<sup>41</sup>*

In the *Genesis*, God delivers but one commandment to Adam, "*Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*"<sup>42</sup> But what exactly does a commandment add up to within the context of an onomathaic language? As in the case of God's creation of light by the mere naming of it, we find that any such name that purportedly shares something of the essence of its object amounts to a commandment to that object. In his naming of the beasts, the first sub-creative act, Adam establishes his dominion over them. In a world where no distinction exists between subject and object, Adam imparts something of his own nature to the beasts he names, as well as participating in their respective natures. But how are we to accommodate this to the doctrine of Free Will? The phrase, God 'brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them', certainly reads like a test of Adam's ability

to intuit accurately for himself, and Philo is explicit on the free will issue:

*God brought all the animals to Adam, wishing to see what appellations he would design for them severally. Not that he was in any doubt - for to God nothing is unknown - but because He knew that He had formed in mortal man the natural ability to reason of his own motion, so that He Himself might have no share in faulty action.<sup>43</sup>*

Adam must therefore stand outside the law which binds the namer to the named, and significantly we find that God does not formally name Adam. In Genesis II:18 he is still simply 'the man', but in the following verse, i.e. that which tells of the naming of the beasts, 'the man' has suddenly become 'Adam'. In contrast we find Adam in III:20 formally naming his wife Eve 'because she was the mother of all living'; women, in patriarchal Hebrew society, were held to be as firmly under the dominion of men as the beasts of the field, and are mythically placed there in Genesis by the ceremony of naming. We must assume that Adam, being made in the likeness of God, also received the divine faculty of free will, and that being so, Adam concedes to what we might call the Onomathaic Law by an act of obedience. God's commandment suddenly becomes important only in that it is a commandment and thereby allows Adam to submit to the Law. Had the paths of the garden of Eden been suitably gravelled, God might as well have commanded man to 'Keep off the grass'; the intrinsic charge is irrelevant, the principle of obedience being the sole point.<sup>44</sup>

With the entrance of the serpent all this ceases as, for the first time, a subtext is introduced to the garden. The possibility that words might not mean precisely what they say, or may mean more than they appear to, is subtly introduced through the serpent's use of the ironic trope. "Ye shall not surely die"<sup>45</sup> he tells Eve, in direct contradiction of God. Ambiguity establishes a taut equilibrium, which dramatizes Eve's choice; in

their respective senses both God and the serpent are right. The serpent is right in that upon eating the fruit Adam does not immediately fall down dead, but God is vindicated by Adam's ultimate mortality. However since this occurs 930 years after the expulsion from Eden (assuming the tale of years is reckoned from this point, history being untenable before the Fall), the point is that Adam was not to know that God was right until 930 years later. More bemusing still is the fact that both the serpent and God are also *wrong*; the serpent, in that Adam's death is surely ordained from the moment of his eating the fruit, and God, because he did claim that "*in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.*" That 'day' assumes the proportions of a millenium. But it is vain to puzzle over such contradictions, when the important thing to realise is that contradictions have entered the narrative. From the moment of the serpent's truly 'forked-speech', the meaning of language may only be arrived at through an interpretive act, an act in the course of which things can go wrong.

In this context, Adam's disobedience may be seen as a breaking of the consensus; in doing so, he destroys the Onomathaic Law, engendering the fall of language. He has, by an act of will, withdrawn himself from the integrated natural environment and has become the Eternal Subject.

Such at least is my exposition of the myth of the Fall of Language. Others are possible in which the details will vary, though the basic pattern will, I think, remain the same. I have used the terms 'myth' and 'mythological' quite liberally throughout this chapter, in most instances simply as a synonym for 'poetic', as in the hieroglyphic phase of language. Indeed, as the mythic aspect of the Adamic language amounts to a poeticizing of the poetic phase of language, one might almost regard the Eden myth as a metapoetic sub-creation. As my intention is to explore the nature of myth and the sacred in the next chapter I do not wish to become too embroiled in detailed definitions of the mythological at this point, but rather to turn to the way Tolkien reacted to the themes thrown up by the notion



of a fallen language.

The Silmarillion, and later, The Lord of the Rings, were born out of Tolkien's attempts to create languages of his own. "The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse,"<sup>46</sup> he claimed, since a language without a race to speak it and a contextual world to reflect is no language at all, but rather a scholarly abstraction. This self-professed philological genesis has largely been skirted around or ignored by the critics, with the exception of Professor Shippey. Isaacs, in an otherwise sympathetic article, suggests that "Tolkien's own off-hand remarks about the importance of philology to the creative conception of the trilogy need not be taken too seriously."<sup>47</sup> Edmund Wilson's notoriously vitriolic review of The Lord of the Rings, speaks derisively of Tolkien's claim to have been engaging in a 'philological game'<sup>48</sup>, though Colin Wilson suggests that Tolkien was being a little disingenuous in making this claim, in an attempt to 'disarm his critics'.<sup>49</sup> Such a narrow critical approach may well be a result of a longstanding feud between the academic schools of 'Lit. and Lang', a struggle Tolkien himself became embroiled in, and eventually achieved an uneasy compromise between the contending factions within the Oxford English School.<sup>50</sup> Philology, with its dust dry rules governing sound shifts and reconstructed 'asterisk languages', contained for its enthusiasts potentially endless romantic vistas of Gothic, Lombardic and Hunnish empires, invigorated by incisive insights into everyday life in Dark Age Europe, all deduced from comparative analysis of the few extant fragments of Old Germanic languages which would otherwise be quite irrecoverable. Literary critics, however, failed to view it like this; to them rather it was an abstract, rigid discipline that took no account of the creativity to be discovered in actual literature. Regrettably this brought a severe backlash from the philologists, and both sides attempted to purify their own syllabus of the others influence, with the result that, as any objective view discloses, both disciplines suffered from the lack of positive input from the other. This was the conclusion reached by Tolkien in his



Manifesto for the teaching of English, which proposed a joint syllabus which survives at Oxford to the present day, though his conciliatory overtures were often counter-balanced by his laconic sniping at 'the critics' in many of his academic papers. The unfortunate legacy remains with us even today, exemplified by R.J. Reilley's insistence that "no one ever exposed the nerves and fibres of his being in order to make up a language; it is not only insane, it is unnecessary."<sup>50</sup>

But this is patently not so, as a careful reading of Tolkien discloses. Language for him is fallen and must be redeemed by a 'recovery of freshness of vision. This can only be done by investing it with a new mythological content, and the simplest way to achieve this for a professional philologist was to set aside the stale mother-tongue and invent new languages, the words of which would be imaginatively synthesized with their referents. In *On Fairy Stories*, where, rejecting Max Müller's view that mythology is a disease of language, he insists that:

*Mythology is not a disease at all, though it may, like all human things, become diseased. You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the mind. It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology.*<sup>51</sup>

Why 'modern European languages' should be especially singled out as being diseased must be regarded as an idiosyncratic aspect of Tolkien's character, though not an uninformative one. Never a man with much time for the modern world in any of its aspects, Tolkien took delight in the 'dead' languages - Old English, Gothic, Old Norse, Welsh, Latin and Greek - which indicates a retrospective linguistic yearning, which may well be interpreted as an instinct towards a pre-lapsarian, or at least poetic, language. Such an instinct led eventually to the creation of two fully developed Elvish languages and several others which remained in draft form only. (Ever the philologist, he seems to have been working towards a family tree of languages very like

that of the Indo-European group.) Quenyan is spoken by the High Elves, the Vanar, who remain in a state of grace and are not involved in the series of 'Falls' that effect the other elves; it is the language of the Undying Lands, thus corresponding to the Adamic language. Sindarin, the 'Gnomic tongue', is spoken by the elves who refused to enter the blessed Realm and remained in Middle Earth, and by the fallen Noldor, exiled from paradise. They remember only fragments of Quenyan, which had once been mother tongue to them all, and use it only in poetry, hymns and other ritual language, thus earning it the nickname - in the Primary world, not within the fiction - 'elf-Latin'. Significantly it is the pre-lapsarian tongue that is used in the nearest thing we have to an elvish prayer.<sup>52</sup>

The love and patience Tolkien lavishes on his created languages enacts in a manner quite unforeseen Edwards' assertion that the rôle of the writer is to effect "the renewal of language, and beyond, in acts of renaming"<sup>53</sup>, which once achieved "adumbrates no less than the renewal of reality, of ourselves, of the disrupted harmonies," (i.e. Tolkien's principle of Recovery). The recovered language, once again synthesizing man and nature, will re-acquire its old magical properties. To this end, the exercise of magic is identical with the writing of fantasy:

*The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalisation and abstraction, sees not only green-grass, discriminating it from other things...but sees that it is green as well as grass. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent. And that is not surprising: such incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives, a part of speech in a mythical grammar. The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. If it could do one it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When*

we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanted power - upon one plain; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes....we may cause woods to spring up with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such 'fantasy', as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes sub-creator.<sup>54</sup>

For Tolkien then language contains magical potentials which lead inevitably to sub-creation, which in turn raises literary form to a state analogous to that of the Primary world itself. Furthermore, language is not just a medium for him, it is also his principal subject. Words are the units of sub-creation, a principle he builds into the text of *The Silmarillion* at the outset in the Creation Myth of the *Ainulindalë*. As we have seen, Ilúvatar the Creator bids the Ainur to sing 'in harmony together a Great Music', in which each

*shall show forth [his] powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will.*<sup>55</sup>

Although the Music of the Ainur is vocal, their language is pristine and unfallen; their voices are 'like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words'<sup>56</sup> (My emphasis). In considering Tolkien's fiction, we should do well to take the Music of the Ainur as a paradigm and regard all examples of songs, chants and even instrumental music as linguistic structures within the symbolic framework of the plot.<sup>57</sup> They represent the ritualization of language, which is thereby able to override the gap between signifier and signified. Music presents us with the perfect analogue for an unfallen language, speaking to us directly, a non-cognitive communication, which requires no interpretive act. In listening to music it is almost possible to imagine the distinction between subject and object abolished, a point which George Steiner has repeatedly made. "The truths," he says, "the necessities of ordered feeling in the musical experience are not irrational; but they are irreducible to reason or pragmatic



reckoning.<sup>50</sup> It is perhaps just this irreducible immediacy that Tolkien is hinting at when he has Sam declare to Frodo: "*I feel as though I were inside a song, if you take my meaning*".<sup>51</sup>

Song and chant, as ritualized language, may be expected, as with any other ritual, to be directed at an increase of power. Perhaps Tolkien's best use of the device is the War Song of the Ents<sup>52</sup>; ponderous and repetitive, it powerfully dramatizes Nature itself rising up against the abuses of man, an event that could hardly be described in demotic terms. The Psalm-like ritual of Gwaihir's Song, bringing news to the people of Minas Tirith of their deliverance from evil is likewise effective for not being naturalistic.<sup>53</sup> Consider another example;

"He chanted a song of wizardry,  
Of piercing, opening, of treachery."

This chant takes us to the very heart of the relevance of poetic language to Fantasy; any isolated survival of the Onomathic Law will inevitably appear in this fallen world as Magic. What else are we to call the power of words to transmute and translate physical objects. Tolkien was only too aware that the word '*spell*', which is, in effect, what the above quotation comprises, derives from the Anglo-Saxon word *spell*, meaning 'speech' or 'narrative', the same root as our other word '*spell*', to give the correct formulation of letters that make up a given word.<sup>54</sup> Note how the above verse demonstrates formally what it attempts to convey descriptively, i.e. the account of the wizard's song has itself the shape and colour of a spell. Its components illustrate the hieroglyphic nature of the language; 'piercing' and 'opening' enact the potential of apposite words upon inanimate reality, what we might call the telekinetic potential of poetic language, while 'treachery' reminds us of the ambivalence of such a language in a fallen world.

Tolkien illustrates the awesome and potentially dangerous powers of language in a key scene in *The Lord of the Rings*. During the Council of Elrond, Gandalf speaks the words inscribed on



the One Ring in their original Black Speech, the tongue of the Enemy:

*The change in the wizard's voice was astounding. Suddenly it became menacing, powerful, harsh as stone. A shadow seemed to pass over the high sun, and the porch for a moment grew dark. All trembled and the elves stopped their ears.*

*'Never before has any voice dared to utter words of that tongue in Imladris,*

*Gandalf the Grey,' said Elrond, as the shadow passed and the company*

*breathed once more.'*<sup>53</sup>

Although often categorized by critics as æsthetes, the elves reaction here is no mere display of over fastidiousness at the clashing, grinding consonants of a foreign language. Were the flaw in that tongue merely a matter of æsthetics or xenophobia it would have no power to cast a shadow over the sun. The words themselves contain a power to effect the physical world and as such must be regarded as a form of spell.

Other examples of the onomathic potential of language abound in Tolkien's fiction. King Théoden's malaise is brought about by Gríma's poisonous whispering in his ear (and we may hear note the reference to the Serpent of Genesis in Gríma's soubriquet, 'Wormtongue'). His power to corrupt with language is presumably drawn from his real master, Saruman, whose hypnotic voice is almost proverbial in Middle-earth and gives an entire chapter in The Two Towers its title. Gandalf warns the other members of the company against the power of Saruman's voice before they parley with him, and Théoden and others duely feel the persuasive power of his tongue. A rather different kind of example shows us language itself taking on a *sui generis* quality, not only forcing themselves to be spoken but having remarkable effect on the speaker; with Frodo seemingly mortally wounded, the despairing Sam confronts the monstrous spider Shelob:

*And then his tongue was loosed and his voice cried in a language which he did not know:*

*A Elbereth Gilthoniel,  
o menel palan-diriel,  
le nallon sí di'nguruthos  
A tiro nin, Fanuilos.<sup>64</sup>*

The result of this almost Pentecostal utterance is that Sam is galvanized into heroic action, slaying Shelob against all the odds. Other examples of characters somehow understanding languages not previously known to them abound. While sheltering in Bombadil's house, the hobbits are able to understand those of his songs that are in *'an ancient language whose words were mainly those of wonder and delight'*, as they later understand Goldberry's song. An interesting identification is made between language and the landscape that had shaped the people that speak it when Legolas remarks of Aragorn's song in the language of the Rohirrim that it is *'like to the land itself, rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains...laden with the sadness of Mortal Men'*.<sup>64a</sup>

One of the best known generic examples of the magical potential of words is that of the personal name, which was jealously guarded in most primitive societies. One recalls the Egyptian myth of the elaborate lengths Isis went to to discover Re's true name and thereby gain dominion over him,<sup>65</sup> and the rage of Rumplestiltskin on having his secret name discovered. Sir James Frazer describes the attitude of the North American Indian, who

*regards his name, not as a mere label, but as a distinct part of his personality, just as much as his eyes or his teeth, and believes that injury will result just as surely from the malicious handling of his name as from a wound inflicted on any part of his physical organism. This belief was found among the various tribes from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and has occasioned a number of curious regulations in regard to the concealment and change of name.*<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, strong Celtic warriors are known to have died because a disgruntled bard has composed a satire on their name. Sir John Rhys has demonstrated that according to Celtic belief, the name was actually a component part of the soul, while Hilda Ellis Davidson observes that

*it was customary to name Germanic kings after their predecessors, sometimes by using only a part of their name again, while in the Viking age, a child would usually be named after someone in the family who had died, frequently a grandparent. This could have developed out of an assumption that the dead might in some way 'return' in his descendant, or that at least the former luck and strength which he had enjoyed might accompany the name.<sup>67</sup>*

The principle underlying these beliefs would seem to be closely akin to that outlined above, relating to the pre-lapsarian unity of man, nature and speech. The name is sacred because it is held to contain something of the individual's *mana*, a vocalized extension of his self. We are not surprised then to find the same reverence for the personal name among the more ancient inhabitants of Middle Earth. The dwarves, for example, not only refuse to reveal their true names, which they will not even carve on their tombs, but also refuse to speak their native language, Khuzdûl, in the presence of any non-dwarf, using instead a dialect of 'Westron' and 'public' names. The Ents are as reticent as the dwarves. Treebeard is astonished at Merry and Pippin's readiness to reveal their own true names to any new acquaintance. He tells them that he has no intention of telling them his true name, and goes on to explain that

*for one thing it would take a long while: my name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long time; so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things*

*they belong to in my language, in the old Entish, you might say.*<sup>68</sup>

Since the length of an entish name depends on the age of the bearer, the implication here is that the name is somehow a part of the bearer, growing with him and recording his history. This is no arbitrary Saussurian connection between signifier and signified; it is a *necessary* connection. It is hardly accidental that it is the Ents who preserve this ancient belief; quite apart from their longevity, they are, of all the Free Peoples, the closest to their natural context. Closer even than the elves, the ents are so integrated with their silvan environment that many of them are becoming increasingly 'treeish'. As if to demonstrate the equilibrium of this natural synthesis, some of the trees are becoming 'entish' and moving of their own volition, emphasising the hypostatic identity of ent with tree, the object that occupies the average ent for much of his time, just as man, formed from the clay of Eden like the animals, shared a hypostatic identity with the rest of nature before the disjunction of the Fall.

It was one of these entish-trees, or *huorns*, Old Man Willow, which shut Merry and Pippin in a cleft in its bole in a much earlier episode in the novel, from whence they were released by Tom Bombadil. When informed of the hobbits' plight, he replies "That can soon be mended. I know the *tune* for him!"<sup>69</sup> (my emphasis), whereupon he "put his mouth to the crack and began singing into it in a low voice." Once again we find words used in a ritualized form to effect a physical change in the natural environment. In this context it is surely significant that Bombadil - of all Tolkien's creations one of the most integrated with his natural environment - not only sings and recites verse a great deal, but also, as Shippey has demonstrated, speaks a species of highly accented prose, which spoken aloud conforms to verse-like patterns:

*Tóm will give you good advice,/till this day is over/(after that your own luck/must go with you and guide you)*<sup>70</sup>



The specific link between the true personal name and the individual will is strikingly made in in The Lord of the Rings, wherein the Dark Lord is served by a man who surrendered his entire will to him so long ago that he no longer possesses a name of his own, being known only as the Mouth of Sauron. Sauron himself, according to Aragorn, aware of these dangers, does not "use his right name, nor permit it to be spelt or spoken"<sup>59</sup>. Similarly a personal name is used to compel the bearer against his will in the important scene in which Gandalf deposes the traitorous Saruman. Saruman, having just poured scorn on the company, and even accused Gandalf of being drunk, turns angrily from his balcony and disappears inside his tower:

*'Come back, Saruman," said Gandalf in a commanding voice.*

*To the amazement of the others, Saruman turned again, and as if dragged*

*against his will, he came slowly back to the iron rail, leaning on it,*

*breathing hard.*<sup>70</sup>

It is significantly the transfigured Gandalf the White who now possesses the ability to use language so effectively. After his death and resurrection in Moria he has resumed something of his angelic nature, thus elevating his words to a state of grace, at least when he speaks *ex cathedra*, as it were, which is marked by his unveiling his shimmering white robes.

This episode encapsulates Tolkien's concern with the inherent power of the poetic mode, as mythologized in the concept of an onomathaic language, but it does so in the relatively straight forward manner of simply dramatizing the issues. This is no more than the 'fleshing out' of a writer's theme, and as such is no more the prerogative of fantasy than any other form of narrative fiction. But Tolkien employs two other methods towards his end of 're-mythologizing' language in order to effect its recovery, and with it, our conception of ourselves within the world. I shall discuss the second of these in the following chapter, in the light

of Barfield's Poetic Diction. I wish to turn now to the uses to which Tolkien puts his invented languages.

The plethora of 'elvish' words and names have caused uneasiness in some quarters. Edward Crankshaw, for example, one of Unwin's external readers, while reporting favourably on the prose draft of the *Quenta Silmarillion*, complained of the 'eye-splitting Celtic names'.<sup>71</sup> The names were, of course, not Celtic but Quenyan and Sindarin elvish, though Tolkien found Crankshaw's view a difficult one to understand, maintaining his conviction that the chiefest pleasure his readers had from his works was derived from the elvish names. While admittedly initially confusing for the reader, the names do have a pure poetic value of their own, and I intend 'pure' in a very modern sense, in that, when first encountered, they are divorced from reference of any kind, their poetry residing in their euphonic value alone. Tolkien once remarked that for him the most beautiful word in the English language was *cellar-door*, in its purely phonic aspect, devoid of all denotive and connotive meaning. The point could be pressed home if we defamiliarize the word by transposing it as *sels'dôr*. In a letter to his aunt, Jane Neave, he expanded on this point;

As for plenilune and argent, they are beautiful words before they are understood - I wish I could have the pleasure of meeting them for the first time again....And the meaning of fine words cannot be made 'obvious', for it is not obvious to anyone: least of all adults who have stopped listening to the sound because they think they know the meaning. They think argent 'means' silver. But it does not. It and silver have a reference to x or chem. Ag, but in each x is clothed in a totally different phonetic incarnation: x+y or x+z; and these do not have the same meaning, not only because they sound different and so arouse different responses, but also because they are not in fact used when talking about Ag. in the same way. It is better, I think, at any rate to begin with, to hear 'argent' as a sound only (z without x) in a poetic context, than to think 'it only means silver'. There is some chance then

*that you may like it for itself, and later learn to appreciate the heraldic overtones it has, in addition to its own peculiar sound, which 'silver' has not.*<sup>72</sup>

Names like *Tol Sirion*, *Tinúviel*, *Gondolin* and *Beleriand* operate on the reader to achieve a distancing effect, a sense of mysterious otherness. It produces, in other words, an aural variant on Chestertonian *Mooreeffoc*,<sup>73</sup> a phenomenon that, on closer examination, seems to consist of a mild form of wonder accompanied by a loss of the faculty of expression. Our fallen language is unequal to the expression of our momentary experience which has transcended our fallen condition. We could go so far as to define this Chestertonian 'queerness' as an experience deprived of any referential meaning; it is the existential moment, turned inwards on itself, for which Joyce coined the term 'epiphany'.

The alien 'elvish' tongues, at first reading, accomplish this precisely. The word, like the experience, becomes a thing-in-itself and at this level all hermen<sup>e</sup>utic analysis must break down. There are no assumptions to be made about the text because any assumption must necessarily refer to something outside or beyond the word. A verse passage from *The Lord of the Rings*, the celebrated Hymn to Varda, will illustrate my point:

*A Elbereth, Gilthoniel,  
silivren penna míriel,  
o menal aglar elenath!*<sup>74</sup>

At first reading these words defy interpretation. The only cognitive reaction possible to the words *o menal aglar elenath* is the tautologous and as yet utterly meaningless *o menal aglar elenath*. Since we do not know that the words mean, they can have no denotive sense, and since we have never encountered them before, they must also lack connotive dimensions. Is this then to say that the words are meaningless? No more than, as Cratylus put it, "the noise of hammering on a brazen pot"?

On the contrary, the words do possess an exceptional inherent



beauty, identical in quality to our disembodied *Sela'dôr*. They mean precisely what they say; sufficient in themselves they become, in Eliot's phrase, still points in a turning world. Their meaning is immediate, inexpressible, incapable of articulation; they hang shining in the Void, like the Flame Imperishable of Ilúvatar. They underpin Tolkien's claim that *The Lord of the Rings* was "largely an essay in linguistic esthetic"<sup>75</sup>

But the word is quickly made flesh. Any word strange to us rapidly and inevitably acquires connotive associations, even if those associations are no more than our initial bewilderment and incomprehension with which we first met the word. Secondly, the elvish names acquire almost immediately a contextual meaning. The introduction of a new name is accompanied by an explanation; thus we quickly learn that *Gondolin* is the Hidden City built by the elven king Turgon; *Tinúviel* is an epithet of the beautiful elf-maiden Luthien, and means, we are told, 'nightingale'. Reference cannot long be delayed, since the text is, predominantly, in a language familiar to us. However many words we might be bombarded with, they invariably involve a juxtapositioning with, or predication in, our own language. Even the *Elbereth, Gilthoniel* passage is clearly more than a collocation of random phonic units; it has meaning, however incompetent we might be to discover it. We recognise from its form and rhythm that it is a piece of verse, while a closer analysis would reveal elements of an alien grammar. Certain words are distinguished with upper-case capitals and case endings are identifiable. We might even take the tentative leap of associating it with the Indo-European family of languages, and postulating that the 'o' of *o menal aglar* suggests an apostrophe, concluding that that line at least is in the vocative. (As it happens, remarkably, we would be correct).

But the poetic strength lies in the fact that the names, even when explained, are quite new to us. Much of the power of *The Silmarillion*'s narrative would have been lost if we had been told that the name of the High King of the Noldor in exile was, not Finrod Felagund, but Maurice.<sup>76</sup> (Ironically one of Tolkien's more highly regarded imitators, Stephen Donaldson, made just such a



mistake in naming one of his legendary kings 'Kevin')).<sup>77</sup> Even when elvish words have become as familiar to us as names like Shylock and Othello, they still retain, connotively, something of the original sense of mystery with which we first met them. Indeed the point is a general one, for who does not feel something of that dramatic Shakespearian magic at the mention of the names Shylock and Othello.

But our initial lack of reference has not been quite as total as we might have thought on encountering Tolkienian elvish. Its creator uses another technique which may be held to provide the reader with a kind of pseudo-gloss; the technique of double etymology. Some of the invented words mask potential subliminal associations through a phonic resemblance to different though appropriate English words. So, while Tolkien can justly refute any suggestion that there is an etymological link between the name Sauron and the Greek σαυρος (= 'lizard'),<sup>78</sup> no amount of protestation can alter the fact that the reader receives from the name a subtle impression of sourness. The truth of this may be demonstrated by considering how unthinkable it would have been for Tolkien to have given the name Sauron to any of the good characters; imagine Frodo having been called Sauron Baggins, or the name belonging to Legolas or Aragorn. There can be few admirers of Tolkien's work who do not heave a sigh of relief that he, albeit reluctantly, changed his hero's name from Bingo Bolger-Baggins to Frodo.<sup>79</sup>

The influence of this double etymology has been pointed to, though in a rather flippant manner, by Nick Otty, with regard to the words in Black Speech inscribed on the One Ring - those that Gandalf spoke aloud to such dramatic effect on Elrond's porch:

*Ash nazg durbatalûk*  
*ash nazg gimbatul*  
*ash nazg thrakatalûk*  
*agh burzum-ishi krimpatul.*<sup>80</sup>

Otty, following Lewis Carroll's principle of the 'portmanteau word', has scrutinized this verse and identified the following examples of double etymology:

*ash, dur (hard), bat, batul (battle), uk (hook, lock), batuluk (battlehook), grim, krimp (crimp, cramp). And less obviously: thak (thwack). Agh (aarrgghh! in horror comics) and nazg (snag, nags, gnash).<sup>91</sup>*

Very little of this is conveyed in the translation offered by Gandalf-

*One ring to rule them all,  
One ring to find them;  
One ring to bring them all  
And in the darkness bind them,*

but the appropriateness of the subliminal technique becomes apparent when one considers the nature of the users of this barbaric language, the orcs, trolls and other servants of Sauron. One scarcely wonders that the elves stopped their ears when Gandalf recited the original words.

Edwards draws attention to Celia and Louis Zukofsky's 'translation' of *Catulus*, one of modern literature's most striking examples of this kind of bi-lingual punning.<sup>92</sup> Each Latin line is rendered into its nearest phonic, rather than semantic, English equivalent. The effect is remarkable, setting up a constant interplay between the Latin and English of the parallel texts, but it differs from Tolkien's technique in that it effects the reader on the conscious, primarily, the intellectual level. Tolkien's elvish, Black Speech and *Kuzdûl* operate most effectively at the unconscious level, closer in effect to that of Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, in which we find a similar mythic world in which the familiar carries us along, but the unfamiliar operates on us subliminally to produce a sense of translucent otherness. It is another of the mechanisms by which Recovery is achieved.

Thus the elven hymn, even at its first reading, carries the faintest glimmer of - arbitrarily - associated meaning. *Silivren* suggests silver, for example. In fact, it does not actually mean silver, but the secondary connotation of silverness serves to augment an overall impression of the verse which is far from being at odds with the actual meaning of the poem as a whole, which speaks of qualities of light and sheen among the trees.<sup>93</sup>

Tolkien himself confirms the importance of the connotive dimension of his invented languages when he intrudes this phenomenon into his fictional Secondary world. Commenting on the etymology of the elven word *fanuilos*, which occurs a little later in the same Hymn to Varda, he says:

*'Everwhite' is an inadequate translation;...The element ui (Primitive Elvish oio) means ever; both fan- and los(s) convey white, but fan connotes the whiteness of clouds (in the sun); loss refers to snow.*

*Amon Uilos, in High-elven Oiolosse, was one of the names of the highest peaks of the Mountains of Valinor, upon which Manwë and Varda dwelt. So that an Elf using or hearing the name Fanuilos, would not only think of (or picture) only a majestic figure robed in white, standing in a high place...he would at the same time picture an immense peak, snow-capped, crowned with a piercing or dazzling cloud.*<sup>94</sup>

In this passage, Tolkien appears not only to be affirming the importance of the principle of connotivity in enriching, or poeticizing, language, but incidentally provides us with a first rate example of how language may be reforged to recover something of the mythic consciousness of the pre-lapsarian state. Through the soubriquet *Fanuilos*, the image of Varda, Queen of the Heavens, is synthesized with that of the mountain on which she resides, resulting in something far stronger than what we would recognize as a simple synecdoche.



I have spoken at some length of Tolkien's response to the myth of the Fall as far as language is concerned; I should like to end this chapter with a brief discussion of how the fall of both man and language informs his concept of Story. I would remind the reader of Tolkien's opinion that "there cannot be any 'story' without a fall - all stories are ultimately about the fall". In this, Michael Edwards seems to be in complete agreement with Tolkien, devoting the fourth chapter of Towards a Christian Poetics to arguing this very point, explaining how the western concept of Story both illustrates and participates in - again we note the dual function of writing as Expression and Being, Description and Participation in the mythic process - the ternary dialectic pattern. The need for story, he suggests, is the human need to escape from the fallen world in to a newly created - Tolkien would say subcreated - world, that of the fiction; a world with a beginning, middle and end, in which every character has the satisfaction of knowing that every incident that besets them has some kind of meaning, in contrast to the random concatenation of events that make up real life. Indeed it is difficult to find any significant difference between Edwards' position and that of Tolkien. It will be expected, he says, that the general trend of the Story will be to conform to the three-part dialectic. He discusses some of the seminal texts of the story genre, the Decameron, The Canterbury Tales, Malory's Tale of the Sankgreal and The Divine Comedy, noting that they are, quite self-consciously, stories about stories, and about the act of telling stories. Malory's work ends, like Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu, with the information that the tales, or 'adventures', related in the foregoing narrative are then to be set down in a book - the book, in effect, that the reader has just finished reading. The text is turned inside out, in the manner of a Möbius strip, as it were, in a reflexive mythos.

Tolkien uses the same reflexive narrative technique. We are told in the Preface and Appendices to The Lord of the Rings that the text of the story is a translation of the Red Book, which was written by, among others, Bilbo Baggins. Within the novel, we find Bilbo, having already written up his earlier adventures as 'There



*and Back Again; a Hobbit's Holiday* - which we know 'in translation' as *The Hobbit*, telling Frodo to keep a careful record of his journey south with the Ring so that Bilbo can write up any subsequent adventures that Frodo might have. At this moment we can detect a faint echo of that *grandeur* of the timeless Edenic state. We read, in the fictive past tense, of Bilbo projecting to record, at some future time, not only events that lie in the future of the mythos' chronology, but also the very moment in the present at which he is taking his leave of Frodo; in fact this very passage is - mimetically - part of the result of this projection.<sup>95</sup> Past, present and future are synthesized. As it turns out, it is Frodo who writes up his own adventures, following on from where Bilbo left off, but the moment is repeated at the end of the book when Frodo leaves the volumes of the Red Book, with blank pages at the end, to be completed after his departure by Sam. This is emphasized in the drafts of the previously unpublished Epilogue to *The Lord of the Rings*, in which Sam discusses the completion of the Book with his eldest daughter, Elanor, and shows her the notes he has been making.

*"Well dear," said Sam, "this top page is only today's batch." He sighed. "It isn't fit to go in the Book like that. It isn't a bit like the story as Mr Frodo wrote it. But I shall have to make a chapter or two in proper style, somehow."*<sup>96</sup>

The text turns inwards on itself when we realise that the very passage we are reading is, ostensibly, part of one of those chapters written by Sam. Similarly Tolkien's characters show an awareness of their condition as constituent players within a story, as described by Edwards. He cites the disappointment of Gawain, Ector and the other knights deemed not worthy enough to approach the Graal on learning from an hermit that they have ceased to have even ordinary, common-or-garden adventures because the tale of the Graal Quest has superseded all other tales at that part of Malory's narrative.<sup>97</sup> As characters they have become surplus to requirement. Tolkien's central characters have the opposite experience, though

the principle is the same; they are aware that they are playing out major parts in a story (e.g. Sam's comment that he felt as though he were 'inside a song'). Bilbo sadly reflects at Rivendell that tales never come to an end, but are taken over by different characters who propel the story onwards,<sup>88</sup> as the task of disposing of the Ring found by himself in The Hobbit now falls to Frodo in The Lord of the Rings. Much later, Frodo and Sam take up his theme, discussing the nature of such stories as they rest on the threshold of Mordor. Sam used to think, he says, that adventures were something great folk went out looking for:

*"But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually - their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on - and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end...I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?"<sup>89</sup>*

It suddenly occurs to the hobbits that not only are they participating in their own story, nor indeed in a simple continuation of Bilbo's, but are in fact taking part in a story that stretches back thousands of years. Recalling the nursery tale of Beren recovering the Silmaril from Morgoth, the first Dark Lord in the First Age of Middle Earth, it suddenly occurs to Sam that he and Frodo are continuing even that ancient story:

*"...and the Silmaril went on and came to Earendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got - you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?"<sup>90</sup>*

What Sam is in the process of discovering is that, as Edwards says, "*The property of a dialectic is that its resolution is incomplete, its third term becoming the thesis for a further triad and the origin of a new conflict.*"<sup>91</sup> This recalls the pessimism that Carpenter notes in Tolkien's character - "No battle is won for ever; ever, after a respite, the Shadow takes a new form and grows again - but also the grounds of Tolkien's faith, since the general trend is still upwards, towards God. The ternary pattern is clearly displayed in the broad structure of *The Lord of the Rings*, which takes Frodo from the Eden-like domestic contentment of the Shire (*grandeur*), through all manner of hardships culminating in the ultimate horrors of Mordor (*misère*), to the ship that bears him away from the Grey Havens to the paradisaical Undyinglands in the West (redemption). But following Edwards' principle, it is observed the the pattern may be broken down to reveal at least five cyclic repetitions of the mythic process, as the following table demonstrates:

<u>Grandeur</u>	<u>Misère</u>	<u>Redemption</u>
Shire	Attack under Weathertop	Rivendell
Rivendell	Caradhras / Moria	Lothlórien
Lothlórien	Mordor	Field of the Cormallen
Minas Tirith	Scouring of the Shire	The Grey Havens

In most cases the *misère* is a protracted series of events bound up with a journey, though in the above table I have listed the event(s) that might be considered the nadir of that section.<sup>92</sup> Each of the *misère* sequences of the first three cycles climaxed with Frodo near to death, that most wretched condition of fallen man; stabbed with the poisoned Morgul knife under Weathertop; almost impaled on an orc spear in Moria; and first paralysed by Shelob and then facing almost certain death in the lava floes of the erupting Mt Doom. Each successive redemptive phase is a correspondingly greater joy; Rivendell is a delightful environment to recuperate from his wound; it is



in Middle-earth, the almost proverbial 'Last Homely House East of the Sea'; Lothlórien is an elven dreamworld of beauty and song, where time seems to run at a different rate to the outside world, allowing a temporary respite from the horrors of the Quest; the celebrations on the Field of the Cormallen, and the subsequent coronation and marriage of Aragorn marks the successful completion of the Quest; Frodo's embarkation from the Grey Havens, however, is the most complete illustration of the redemptive phase of the dialectic, as he is truly afforded an act of Grace in being allowed to sail for the paradisaical Undyinglands across the Western ocean, otherwise forbidden to mortals.

The structure of *The Lord of the Rings*, then, can clearly be seen to conform to Edwards' on-going Christian dialectic. The poetic content and imagery of the novel also strongly reinforces Tolkien's statement that 'all stories are ultimately about the fall', prompting David Lyle Jeffrey's observation:

*In the dissipation of the strength and power of Lothlórien, a Lothlórien largely recalled in mysterious and powerful utterances of its ancient tongue, we see The Lord of the Rings as a work of art which develops an acute sense of fallenness.*<sup>93</sup>

If the intrinsic Fall of Tolkien's world resides in Melkor's weaving his own corruption into the fabric of Creation at the moment of Arda's birth, the Free Peoples - the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men, as well as the latecomers, Dwarfs and Ents, and of course Hobbits - who possess free will outside the designs of the Valar are each provided with a symbolic fall of their own. The Noldor, under the rebellious leadership of Fëanor, encompass the fall of the elves, first in specifically defying the Valar's prohibition against them leaving the Undyinglands, but more spectacularly by the Kinslaying at Alqualondë, in which the Noldor murder their Telerian cousins and seize their ships to return to Middle Earth in pursuit of



Melkor.<sup>94</sup> One is immediately struck by the parallel of Fëanor, opting for an Edenic exile, immediately compounding his disobedience with an act of fratricide, with the murder of Abel by Cain, hard upon the Biblical account of their parents' exile. The Dwarfs, who suffer from fundamental character flaws of slyness and greed as a result of their maker, Aulë's, secretiveness in their creation, suffer a fall as a result of the affair of the Nauglamír, a jewelled necklace for possession of which they were prepared to murder and wage war.

The origin of Men, as a whole, is never detailed by Tolkien to the extent that he chronicles the earliest days of the elves. Many men, we are told, immediately fell under the influence of Morgoth, particularly in the south and east. Three clans, however, entered Beleriand at an early date and befriended the elves. These, the Houses of Bëor, Hador and Haleth, known as the Edain, or elf-friends, stayed loyal throughout the First Age, and after the overthrow of Morgoth were rewarded with extended lifespans and settlement on the island of Númenor, half-way to the Undyinglands. As the Second Age wears on, however, the Númenórean kings are corrupted by Sauron, abandoning their ancient friendship with the elves, resulting in King Ar-Pharazôn sailing to the Undyinglands with a battlefleet, determined to wrest immortality from the Valar. This act, in a very literal sense, results in the Fall of Man, as the entire island of Númenor collapses beneath the ocean as a result of Ilúvatar's wrath.<sup>95</sup> Precisely how the fall of the ents came about, we never learn; they, of all the Free Peoples, are closest to preserving their harmony with their environment, though we do learn that their eternal sorrow resides in the loss of their spouses, the Entwives, who left them long ago to cultivate gardens and have not been heard of since. Thus Tolkien provides us with a portrait of the least fallen of all the races of Middle Earth facing a slow but certain extinction, lamenting a lost bliss that has disappeared in conjunction with some far-off, unattainable garden. Hobbits, on the other hand, might be expected, as distant relations of mankind, to share in

man's fall. However the tale of Sméagol (Gollum) strangling his cousin Déagol for possession of the Ring resembles the Cain and Abel myth so closely that it is tempting to see in it Tolkien providing an act of sin that serves symbolically to emphasize that hobbits too, for all their rustic charm, are a fallen race.

All the major free peoples are therefore shown to be fallen races existing in an exilic world, and in this respect, Jeffrey is quite right to focus attention on Lothlórien, for it is in the elven peoples that the theme of exile and longing for a paradise which many of them actually remember is most fully developed. Galadriel's plight is a tragic one; though having taken no part in the rebellion against the Valar, she has accompanied her brothers into exile. By the Third Age, they are all dead, but she has married Celeborn, a Morquendian elf who had never journeyed to the Undyinglands and has therefore forfeited his right to go there. When the Noldor are forgiven and granted leave to return to Valinor, Galadriel continually postpones her departure, ruling over Lothlórien with her consort. But Middle-earth is a vale of tears for Galadriel; she has seen her only daughter, Celebrían, tortured to death by orcs,<sup>36</sup> and must watch her grand-daughter, Arwen, forsake elven immortality and embrace human death in marrying Aragorn. When Frodo arrives at the Goldenwood, the land she has turned into a demi-paradise with the power of the elven ring, Nenya, she knows that even her home must fade, for either he will fail in his quest and the Enemy will overwhelm Lórien, or else he will succeed in destroying the One Ring, and with it will go the power of her own ring, with which she sustains her land. The end of The Lord of the Rings sees her embarking for the west with the other Ring-bearers, parting with her husband at the Grey Havens.

Many other examples could be given, but those I have cited are sufficient, I think, to illustrate the vast importance to Tolkien's writing of the romantic myth of the Fall. It not only shapes the structure of his fiction, and provides a major

part of the thematic content, but to a large degree provides him with his inspiration to write, in the hope that, through language something of the pre-lapsarian world might be recovered, since "because the universe is, if diminished, not totally corrupted"<sup>97</sup> and that the elven tongues still have "the power to recover, to still Shelob, the Watchers, the Nazgûl. That is, it is language that most powerfully preserves the traces, the pattern of the leaf of the world's first forest."<sup>98</sup>

## Notes on Chapter Two

1. Northrop Frye, The Great Code, p. 13
2. Owen Barfield, The Rediscovery of Meaning, 1977, reprinted in The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays, p. 12
3. Tyler, The Said and the Unsaid, p. 29
4. Giambattista Vico, Scienza Nuova, trans. T.G. Bergin & M.H. Fisch
5. "As far as the poems, stories, spells, riddles and chronicles written down in the monasteries are concerned, they may have been recorded as much as two or three hundred years after the conversion, and this allows the possibility of prejudice, misinterpretation or deliberate editing when non-Christian beliefs are being dealt with." Hilda Ellis-Davidson, The Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, p. 15
6. Frye, *op.cit.* p. 5
- 6a. Indeed Aquinas is critical of Plato's analogical method, when he writes 'He teaches everything figuratively and by symbols, meaning by the words something other than the words themselves mean, as when he says that the soul is a circle.' (De Anima 3: c. 1)
7. Barfield, *loc.cit.* p. 12
8. Aristotle, Poetics, Ch. 9
9. *ibid.*
10. Robert Lowth, Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, vol. I, trans. G. Gregory, 1787
11. Tolkien, On Fairy Stories, p. 46 *passim*.
12. See J. Christopher, J.R.R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile.
13. Dr Peter Baelz, A Deliberate Mistake? in Christ, Faith and History, ed. Sykes & Clayton, Cambridge University Press 1972, quoted by S. Prickett in Words & the Word
14. As narrated good-humouredly by Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium, 190c-191b (Penguin p. 160-1)
15. Genesis II: 19



16. Philo of Alexandria, De Opificio Mundi, 150, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. I, p. 119
17. Leibniz, *Monadology* §38 (trans. Carr)
18. See Chapter One of current study.
19. *ibid.*
20. McKusick, Coleridge's Philosophy of Language p. 5
21. Plato, Cratylus
- 21a It is worth noting that modern science has in fact produced some evidence for Cratylus' viewpoint. Dr Hans Jenny has developed an instrument called the tonoscope which, by analysing frequencies, is able to convert sounds into three-dimensional images. When a human voice speaks the sound of the letter 'O' into the machine, the image produced is that of a perfect sphere, remarkably the same shape that westerners since the Greeks have chosen to represent its sound alphabetically. (Visualizing Sound in Science Journal June, '68).
22. Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (abridged edition 1984) p. 686
23. Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, trans. R. Latham.
24. Aquinas
25. Steiner, After Babel p. 58.
26. Tolkien, The Letters, p. 269, (note).
27. *ibid.* p. 147
28. *ibid.* p. 48, a discussion on sex and marriage, and p. 145 give an insight into the pervasiveness of Tolkien's religious sense of the fallenness in the primary world.
- 28a. Colin Wilson, Tree by Tolkien.
29. Tolkien, On Fairy Stories, p. 51
30. *idem* The Hobbit p. 206
31. *idem*. *F.R.* p. 455
32. *idem*. *Sil.* p. 56.
33. *idem* Appendix to *The Silmarillion*, p. 431
34. Flieger, *Splintered Light*, pp. 69-70.
35. Michael Edwards, Towards a Christian Poetics.
36. *ibid.* p. 11.

37. This logocentricity distinguishes the Judeo-Christian creation myths from contemporary pagan mythologies, all of which inevitably bind the act of creation to the act of pro-creation. (See N. M. Sarns's Understanding Genesis: the Heritage of Biblical Israel p.12-13). 'Male and female created he them' serves to emphasize God as the divisor of sexuality for his creatures, rather than being governed by it himself. To this extent, Tolkien's much-criticised lack of sexual awareness is quite in line with scriptural tradition. Ilúvatar, like the Judeo-Christian deity, has no female consort, but does seem to sanction some sort of bifurcation of gender in his creation of the Ainur. Within The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings, sexuality does arise, but, as in genuine Scripture, only when relevant to the ethico-historical dialectic which I term 'policy' in Chapter Six; e.g. the enforced marriage of Aredhel to Eöl, and Éowyn's near-suicidal passion for Aragorn.
38. Even Ilúvatar's fiat is firmly in the Judeo-Christian tradition; Helms draws attention to Tolkien's linguistic punning: "one of the ancient forms of the Hebrew verb 'to be' was Yah, the abbreviated third person singular; Tolkien keeps this version of the Fiat, changing only the spelling." (Randel Helms, Tolkien and the Silmarils, p.27)
39. Tolkien, *Sil.* p.15 *passim*
40. *ibid.* p.17
41. T. A. Shippey, The Road to Middle Earth, p. 100
42. Genesis 2:xvi-xvii
43. Philo, De Opificio Mundi §149 (Loeb Classical Library, p.119)
44. This argument is a central one of C. S. Lewis' Preface to 'Paradise Lost', and is certainly one with which Tolkien would have been familiar.
45. Genesis 2:iv
46. Tolkien, Letters p.219.
47. Neil Isaacs, On The Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism, in Tolkien and the Critics, p.7

48. Edmund Wilson, Ooh Those Awful Orcs!
49. Carpenter Biography pp. 141-2
50. R. J. Reilly, Tolkien and the Fairy Story, in Tolkien: the Monsters and the Critics, p. 137
51. Tolkien, O. F. S p. 24
52. A Elbereth Gilthoniel, a hymn of praise to Varda, Queen of the Valar, a figure of great reverence to the elves, in her capacity as Kindler of the Stars (which is what the title of the hymn means. The Quenyan words prove an effective charm against servants of the Enemy, such as the Black Riders and the stone Watchers of Círoth Ungol. The hymn, or variants of it, may be found throughout *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* pp. 114 and 311; *The Two Towers* p. 425; *The Return of the King* p. 375.
53. Edwards, op. cit. p. 12
54. Tolkien, O. F. S. pp. 24-25
55. *idem* Sil. p. 15
56. *ibid.*
57. Note the common etymology of English *charm* and Latin *carmen* = 'song'.
58. George Steiner, Real Presences, p. 19
59. Tolkien, F. R. p. 455
60. *idem*. T. T. p. 106
61. *For a fuller discussion of Gwaihir's Song, see Chapter 5 of current study.*
62. *The belief that words possessed an inherent magical property is traceable further back through the Gothic form spill and the Icelandic spjall.*
63. Tolkien, F. R., p. 333
64. *idem* T. T. p. 425
- 64a. *ibid.* p. 136
65. L. Spence, Egypt, pp. 259-60
66. J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough p. 244
67. H. R. Ellis Davidson, Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe, pp. 122-3
68. *T. T* p. 80

69. F.R. p. 166
- 68a. Shippey, p. 81
- 69b. T. T. p. 15
70. *ibid.* p. 235
71. *idem.* Letters p. 25
72. *ibid.* p. 310
73. See Chapter One of present study.
74. *idem.* R. K. p. 375
75. *idem.* Letters p. 220
76. Two of Tolkien's minor æsthetic failures of nomenclature, both from *The Hobbit*, fall into this category; the unhobbitish surname Sackville-Baggins, and the disastrous naming of the three trolls as William, Tom and Bert, both of which he later went on record as regretting.
77. Stephen Donaldson, The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever
78. Helms, Tolkien's World, p. 74
79. Tolkien, History of The Lord of the Rings vol. VI: The Return of the Shadow, *passim*
80. *idem.* F. R. p. 332
81. N. Otty, The Structuralist's Guide to Middle Earth, in This Far Land
82. Edwards, *op. cit.* p. 171
83. Allan's An Introduction to Elvish defines *silivren* thus: *adj.* (*siliv-* (<Q. *Silima*) + *ren*) (*white*) *glittering, with crystalline glitter. This word would recall the glory of the Silmarils to elvish minds.*
84. Tolkien Letters p. 278
85. *idem.* F. R. p. 265
86. *idem.* Sauron Defeated, p. 124
87. Edwards, *op. cit.* p. 80
88. Tolkien F. R pp. 352/3
89. *idem.* T. T. pp. 402-3
90. *loc. cit.*
91. Edwards *op. cit.* p. 8
92. It will be observed that in this structural table I have



followed Frodo's progress in the third cycle, since the Mordor sequence does amount to the overall *misère* of the novel. It would have been possible to chart the progress of other members of the Fellowship in the same way. In fact for Aragorn an extra cycle can be inserted, thus:

Grandeur

Misère

Redemption

I	Lothlórien	Paths of the Dead	Victory of the Pelennor Fields
II	Minas Tirith	Battle of the Morannon	Coronation & Wedding

93. David Lyle Jeffrey, Tolkien the Philologist, in VII, vol.I p.51

94. Tolkien, Sil. p.99

95. See the *Akallabêth*, (Sil. pp.293-319)

96. idem. R.K., p.395.

97. Jeffrey, op.cit.p.52

98. *loc.cit.*

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### MYTHIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUB-CREATION.

The previous chapter outlined the romantic view of language, which seeks to establish, or re-establish, a poetic unity between word and denoted object, as contrasted with the modernist view of the extreme conventionality of language. Tolkien, an arch-romantic, falls squarely into the former category, and as we have seen, attempts to create language anew, regarding the attempt as a movement towards a transcendence of our Fallen nature towards a deeper knowledge of God. We also noted that the romantic linguistic tradition finds creative expression in the myths of the Adamic language and the Fall *qua* a linguistic phenomenon; and from Michael Edwards, whose views on the redemptive power of language concur with Tolkien's, we took the model of the three-movement dialectic of *grandeur*, *misère* and redemption - a great inverted parabola - a figure to which we shall return in the course of this chapter.

Hitherto this discussion has largely been content to accept the mythic structures at face value, which as anyone creatively concerned with myth will advise is the proper way to treat them; "*He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom*",<sup>1</sup> Tolkien's Gandalf tells his corrupt colleague Saruman. However for the sake of a deeper critical understanding of the processes underlying the myths of creation and sub-creation, the very structures that motivated Tolkien as a writer, it will be necessary to examine the reality supposed by Tolkien to underlie the myth. What exactly does Tolkien mean when he asserts 'we make still by the

law in which we're made'? Indeed, it is all very well to observe Tolkien working within this Romantic tradition, but if we are to accord his theory of the redemptive power of sub-creation any credence we must attempt to evaluate what sort of case can be made for the validity of the the romantic view of language; is it capable of sustaining a metaphysic that is at all meaningful to contemporary man? This chapter is chiefly concerned with the act of sub-creating - as Tolkien perceived it - in its mythic sense and in the sense of whatever actuality might underlie the myth. I shall also give consideration to the corollary of Creation; the myth of Apocalypse and how Tolkien dealt with it according to the principles of sub-creation.

In discussing these issues, I hope to demonstrate that Tolkien did not merely perceive himself as creating, or recreating, myths, but as actually participating in a mythic process itself; for if Man's artistic endeavours can be viewed as a continuation of the mythic divine Creation, it follows that that continuation is itself part of the cosmogonic myth. This supports the second of the four propositions stated in the Introduction to this study; that Tolkien is a religious writer in that "his method is a religious one (in the broad sense of the term), constituting an enactment of a mythic process, vis. the recreation of the cosmogonic moment through art."<sup>2</sup>

### The Nature of Myth and its Relationship to Religion

Since I am here concerned with 'religion' in its broadest sense - i.e. encompassing the whole range of spiritual myth - it will be useful to spend some little time clarifying what exactly I mean by *myth before proceeding to the main argument of this chapter, as outlined above.* In the context of this thesis it is no mere commonplace to maintain that Tolkien is a mythic writer. As the foregoing discussion of the poetic phase of language should have made clear, the language we have inherited with which to discuss religion, as well as æsthetics and ethics, is inherently mythic in character, which is to say that all religious discourse is necessarily mythic in structure. How should it be otherwise, when the object of

that discourse is by definition ultimately unknowable, and thus can only be described by the device of metaphor.

One can go further, and stress that language is inherently metaphoric. The proliferation of vocabulary seems to rest on the device of the radical metaphor, a root word adapted to cover a multiplicity of meanings through early metaphorical identification. Thus we can take the modern English word 'electricity', and discover it originates from *ηλεκτρον*, the Greek name for amber, because of amber's property of picking up strong electro-static charges. But *ηλεκτρον* is itself derived from *ηλεψτωρ*, which denotes 'gleaming' or 'the beaming sun'. In other words, a root word denoting solar brightness was extended metaphorically to embrace the substance amber on the strength of a fancied resemblance of one of the substance's properties, and at a much later date this new word was itself metaphorically applied to the newly discovered energy phenomenon, again on the strength of a similarity of properties. Through a similar etymological process one may discover the importance of mythic concepts in the origins of our language. *Wednesday, cereal, panic, hermeneutics, Easter*; all of these words derive directly from the names of ancient deities. Some words, such as the names of the days of the week, seem not only to have been devotional, but to rest on an actual identification between each specific day and one of the seven planetary deities. The Teutonic/Scandinavian association of Wednesday with *Oðin* (O.E. *Wodan*), is reflected in the French dedication of that same day, *mercredi*, to *Oðin*'s Latin equivalent, Mercury, a correspondence that is born out in every other day of the week. Words such as 'cereal' and 'panic' are attributive; Ceres, the Latin Demeter, gave the gift of the knowledge of cereal farming to mankind, while Greek Pan is blamed for inspiring the ecstatic madness we call 'panic'. Words such as 'hermeneutics' are more recent learned coinages, in this case deriving from Hermes, the psychopomp who acts as Guide, metaphorically guiding the scholar to an interpretation. In words like Easter, from the O.E. *Eastre*, Anglo-Saxon goddess of the spring, who according to Bede held her festival at the vernal equinox, we detect a political element that illuminates the early struggle for the hearts and minds of the people



between the Church and the old pagan religions.<sup>3</sup>

Thus we find that language in anything but its most basic form, is intrinsically metaphorical, and the more complex and sophisticated it becomes, the more metaphorical it will be. But we must here distinguish between radical metaphors of this type, and metaphor used as a figure of speech, what Müller calls *poetical metaphor*. The Romantic argument, as we have seen, holds that the more sophisticated a language becomes, the less metaphorical it will be in its poetic sense, culminating in modern demotic languages that stress the priority of metonymy, the importance of context.

This notwithstanding, we can reasonably claim that in its composition, language is inherently metaphoric, and thereby inherently mythic. Furthermore, as the above examples show, the mythic may be devotional, attributive, political or social. We can go further, and deny the distinction that is sometimes made that some myths are religious while others are social and/or political. The themes that occur again and again as the subject of myth, those of power, weakness, authority, inauguration, validation, are equally the subject of religious and of political and social discourse. This point is not lost on that earliest of modern mythographers, Vico, who argued for a category of myth describing and maintaining politico-social institutions, functioning to create stability within a community, which eventually evolved into religious myth, projecting the same model onto their environment as an animistic theology.<sup>4</sup> Within the 'family' groups, organized as paternalistic hierarchies, the 'fathers' became the 'heroes', the aristocratic caste who retained not only all temporal authority but sacerdotal function also. The poetic imagination was responsible for producing a magic animism which at once determined political institutions and religious rites, both of which served to safeguard the privileges of the heroes against the less gifted *famula* who gradually eroded their power to result in the triumph of the demotic.<sup>5</sup>

There is a vast corpus of mythic material from early civilizations, which is now presented as secularized stories, but was once a vital part of the religious life of the community. By the reign of Augustus, the myths of Greece had become the stuff of

romance for writers like Apuleus, but in its time had been inextricably bound up with the spiritual life of the individual and of society. We can say, then, that all religion is necessarily mythic in form, but more than that, it is impossible to separate myth into a religious category on the one hand, and a socio-political category on the other. Myth is essentially an insulating envelope that protects man from the stark facts of physics and biology, and as such is concerned with questions of mortality and creation, the very issues Tolkien claims to have been addressing in his fiction.

What makes a myth religious is a degree of belief it inspires; not, that is, a public, corporate belief, such as in the political myths of Vico, but a deeper, personal need to believe in its numinous content. Once that degree of belief is removed or diminished, the myth ceases to be religious, dwindling to the fairy tale status of the legends of the Greeks, Egyptians and Norsemen, which may be one reason why Tolkien set such store in fairy tales, regarding them as containing the seeds of consolation, the formal device of the eucatastrophe, traditionally seen as the prerogative of religion, if only belief in them can be re-kindled. Tolkien acknowledged the mythic form of the Christian religion in referring to the Gospel story as a fairy story that happens to be true. Carpenter records the famous conversation that took place one autumn night in 1931, on Addison Walk in Oxford between Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Hugo Dyson that Lewis later claimed had been the immediate cause of his conversion to Christianity. In answer to Lewis' point that he couldn't see how the sacrifice of Christ - *"the death of Someone Else (whoever he was) two thousand years ago"* - could be of any benefit to modern man, Tolkien pointed out that he, Lewis, was capable of being moved whenever he encountered sacrifice in the Northern myths to which he was so devoted. Why could he not simply transfer that admiration to the sacrifice of Christ? Lewis responded that myths, despite their charm, were lies, even though *'lies breathed through silver'*. Tolkien emphatically denied that this was the case, stressing that the Christian myth was a myth that had really happened, and of which the myths of Baldr and others were but imperfect reflections:

*You call a tree a tree, he said, and you think nothing more of the word. But it was not a tree until someone gave it that name...But that is merely how you see it. By so naming things and describing them you are only inventing your own terms about them. And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth.*

*We have come from God (continued Tolkien), and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming a sub-creator and inventing stories can Man aspire to the state of perfection that he knew before the fall.<sup>6</sup>*

This then is a clue to what Tolkien understood by the term 'myth' and its relation to religion. But there are many contending schools of thought as to the nature of myth, but they may comfortably be reduced to four basic ideas which we should do well to review in order to fix exactly what we are to understand by the term in the course of this study:

#### 1) The Naturalistic Theory:

The view that myths are crude attempts to explain the workings of nature, a kind of proto-, or pseudo-scientific construction, held widespread authority in the early years of the century, its main proponent being Sir James Frazer. The view contends that all myths are resolvable to two principal categories, the solar myth and the fertility myth, and would argue for example, that the Eleusinian myth of Persephone and Demeter is no more than an ignorant attempt to explain the cyclic change of the seasons, the fertility of summer yielding to the dirth of winter. This school has little currency today, having been largely discredited by writers like Northrop Frye, and Tolkien's associate, Owen Barfield.

*Many things have to come together in a culture before science can begin, and when it does begin it does not descent from or grow out of mythology directly. Mythological statements about*



*nature are merely grotesque or silly if they are thought to be pre-scientific explanations of it,<sup>7</sup>*

Frye writes, and again, pressing the point;

*Mythology is the embryo of literature and the arts, not of science, and no form of art has anything to do with making direct statements about nature, mistaken or correct. Similarly, as science does not grow out of mythology, so it can never replace mythology. Mythology is recreated by the poets of each generation, while science goes its own way.<sup>8</sup>*

Barfield is equally unsympathetic to the proto-science school, as typified in the following energetic polemic;

*The remoter ancestors of Homer, we are given to understand, observing it was darker in winter than in summer, immediately decided that there must be some 'cause' for this 'phenomenon', and had no difficulty in tossing off the 'theory' of, say, Demeter and Persephone, to account for it. A good name for this kind of banality - the fruit, as it is, of projecting post-logical thoughts back into a pre-logical age - would perhaps be 'Logomorphism'.... Imagination, history, bear common sense - these, it seems are as nothing beside the paramount necessity that the Great Mumbo Jumbo, the patent, double-million magnifying Inductive Method, should be allowed to continue contemplating its own reflection - a golden age in which every man was his own Newton in a world dropping with apples.<sup>9</sup>*

The reason for the vigour of Barfield's attack is that the naturalistic, or proto-scientific view of myths arose out of Max Müller's philological theories of the roots of language, touched upon briefly in the last chapter. Müller had postulated a theory of the earliest monosyllabic root words being extended at a later date in a great flowering of metaphorical activity. Barfield's fundamental disagreement with him over the nature of primitive consciousness,



which, as he indicates above, he sees as being very much pre-logical, will be examined presently in much closer detail.

## 21 The Euhemeristic Theory

A variation on the Naturalistic theory is that which holds myths to be pseudo-histories rather than pseudo-science, confused and elaborated accounts of actual events and people. This school was named for the fourth century Sicillian philosopher Euhemius (or Evemerus), who maintained that the Græco-Latin deities were in fact kings and great warriors of the fabulous island of Panchæa, which he located somewhere in the oceans of the southern hemisphere.<sup>10</sup> A striking example of this view may be found in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, a Christian Iclander of the twelfth century, who prefaces his account of the doings of the Norse gods with an explanation that Oðin was actually an historical warrior king who migrated into Scandinavia from Asia Minor.<sup>11</sup> This view of myth seems to me just as unsatisfactory as the pseudo-science thesis, demoting the form to that of romance. The process can, after all, be observed in the transmutation of the historical Charlemagne into the great, heroic king of the *Chanson de Roland*, a medieval romance that, for all its intrinsic values, does not share the numinous quality of what we are pleased to call genuine myth.

Perhaps we had better reserve the term *legend* for products of this nature. The essential difference between myth and legend, in this sense of the word, is that myth is concerned with the present, with making our surroundings meaningful to us here and now, even though that might mean reaching back into a supposed past in order to vindicate a contemporary practice or institution<sup>12</sup> (ætiological myths); legend on the other hand is a projection of heroic values onto the past for its own sake. In practice it undermines the rôle of the mythic as a model of present experience by articulating dissatisfaction with the present through the aggrandizement of the past. The human imagination with its natural propensity to create myths - and in doing so, Tolkien would say, sub-creating the world - had an equally strong tendency to create legends, and there is no reason to think that the technique of doing so differs in character

to that of myth making, the only difference being the directional thrust of the intention; myths tending towards the stabilizing of the present, legends towards the inflation of the past. The strong psychological need for both myth and legend is recognized by Eliade, in his account of European folk heroes like Dieudonné de Gozon, who is credited with slaying the Malpasso Worm,<sup>13</sup> despite clear extant historical accounts of his life that make no such mention of such an exotic feat. On a more domestic scale, Eliade also cites an account<sup>14</sup> by a mythographer of a story he was told by European peasants of a young shepherd who had become engaged, but on the eve of his wedding had been seduced by a fay and lured over a cliff to his death. Assuming this to have happened centuries earlier, the mythographer was surprised to learn that the event had occurred within living memory, and the shepherd's intended bride still lived in the next village. The mythographer dutifully sought out the fiancée, now an elderly woman, and from her learned that there had never been any suggestion of supernatural interference in her lover's death; he had gone out to recover a lost sheep, and in the darkness had stumbled over the cliff path. He had been alive when he was found next morning but had died soon afterwards. On returning to the first village and relating the old woman's historical account of the event, the mythographer was firmly assured that she was going senile, that she didn't remember the facts, that her mind was still clouded with grief. Within a matter of a mere fifty years or so, the legend had become so entrenched in the popular imagination that no historical cold water could remove its traces. The story highlights two important principles. First, that the domestic tragedy of a young man's death on the eve of his wedding was simply too stark to accept; mortality, the arbitrary waste of life had to be imaginatively transformed into something of more cosmological dimensions. Details of the existence of fays and goblins may not be understood, but their postulated existence at least suggests an order in which such a death has its natural part. Secondly, in dressing up the past in such a way, the present, in the form of the old woman's testimony, is undermined. Doubts are cast on her sanity rather than admit the mundane nature of the tragedy.

### 3) The Psychological Theory;

The view that myths recognise and rehearse psychological patterns, and as such describe the inner life of man. On these lines the myth of the Core becomes a ritualization of human spiritual death and rebirth, while any fertility implications it might have become irrelevant. It is the view, among others, of C.G.Jung and C. Kerényi.<sup>15</sup> While Frye is careful to avoid becoming embroiled in psychological wrangles, this approach is closer to his own than the above, transferring the action to the human stage. Barfield on the other hand is little happier with this definition than he is with the proto-scientific hypothesis, insisting that the myth must unite the spiritual and the concrete, the psychological and the natural.

### 4) The Anthropocentric View;

Barfield's own position defines myth as the creative expression of a unitary consciousness. I have stressed Barfield's views of the above hypotheses because Tolkien's own position is very close to Barfield's, as we shall see. Frye also places myth in the borderland where man's consciousness meets his natural environment, defining it as a cultural phenomenon, 'the embryo of literature and the arts'. He suggests the striking simile of a lighted railway carriage at night, the window of which, regarded by one of the occupants, acts as a mirror, reflecting the activity going on within the carriage; only occasionally may the passenger glimpse a view of dark and indifferent nature going about her business on the other side of the glass.<sup>16</sup> Myth functions, not as a window on nature, but as a mirror to society, reflecting the concerns of 'the envelope of culture' which man has created for himself in which to live, which insulates him from raw nature. As there is nothing in this view that actually contradicts the Barfield/Tolkien position, we may usefully accept this simile.





Myth, for our purposes, is 'about' man, and his relationship with God and nature, not about God or Nature *per se*. It will be recalled that the basis of the myth of the Fall, as well as the nature of the restitution of Man to his intended place in Creation is also a matter of man's relationship to God and Nature.

### Owen Barfield and Mythic Consciousness

Around the mid-1920s, C.S. Lewis introduced Tolkien to Owen Barfield, a London solicitor with a keen interest in the history and relationship of language and myth. Because his work kept him away from Oxford, Barfield was unable to be more than an occasional visitor to the Inklings, the informal discussion group with interests in myth, language, fairy stories and related fiction which gathered every Tuesday and Thursday, and which was dominated by the Lewis brothers, Tolkien and the supernatural-thriller writer Charles Williams. It was during these sessions that Tolkien was first exposed to Barfield's theories of language development which accorded so well with his own æsthetic beliefs and were to influence their further development; beliefs that were to have a direct and profound bearing on his theory and practice of fantasy writing.

Barfield was a convert to the esoteric theories of Anthroposophy, as formulated by the German mystic, Rudolf Steiner, and had applied its principles to philology. To state these complex doctrines as briefly as possible, Anthroposophy postulates an anthropocentric evolutionary process of developing consciousness in which thought constitutes an extrapersonal continuum. In Steiner's own words, "*the idea which Plato conceived and the like idea which I conceive are not two ideas...in the higher sense Plato's head and mine interpenetrate each other.*"<sup>7</sup> The evolution of human consciousness falls into distinct stages, beginning with a state of man's full integration with creation and with the Godhead but remaining an unconscious being. The middle two stages, which may be regarded together,<sup>8</sup> involve the development of conceptual thought in man, resulting in his growing self-awareness and the total subjectivization of his perceptions.



This phase, in the late stages of which we are now embroiled, involves a complete dislocation of man's place in creation, a strong sense of his isolation from God and Nature. A fourth phase is indicated which will restore man to his rightful place, this time with full awareness of his rôle in creation and his unique relationship with the deity. This is to be achieved by a fuller understanding and utilization of the imagination, according intuition equivalent status with sensory perception.

At this stage we might pause to note the familiar structural pattern of this process; a three phase movement that begins at a high point, descends to isolation, and then rises again to a condition preferable even to the original. It is, of course, the same inverted parabolic dialectic described by Edwards, as discussed in the previous chapter. The theological elements of Innocence/Fall/Redemption correspond exactly to the Anthroposophist's phases of Unconscious Integration/Conscious Alienation/Conscious Re-integration.

Much was said in the previous chapter of a poetic phase of language; Vico was the first to describe it in detail, and it was taken up by Herder and the German Romantics. In our own time, Frye and James Joyce, among others, have rediscovered Vico's works and have further elaborated the theory. This tradition, as we have seen, was mythologized as the Adamic language, and in the lapsed world carries connotations of magic. It might be productive to ask just what sort of consciousness would the speakers of such a unified language possess. Barfield attempts to provide an answer in his essay The Rediscovery of Meaning, pointing to the research of Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer rejects the notion of the history of consciousness as a progression from "an initial condition of blank darkness towards wider and wider awareness of a pre-existent outer-world"<sup>13</sup>, arguing instead for "a small, but a growing, and an increasingly clear and self-determined focus of inner human experience from a dreamlike state of virtual identity with the life of the body and of its environment. Self-consciousness emerged from mere consciousness". It is in the course of this process that primitive man 'invented' the subject/object disjunction, self-consciousness inevitably forcing him to draw back from his environment in the rôle of observer, whereas

before no distinction was apparent between himself and the world in which he participated. Naturally language would have evolved to keep pace with this alteration of consciousness. It is important to realize that Cassirer is content to ascribe the term 'consciousness' to the 'dream-like' integrated state, and further support for the theory is forthcoming from the fields of modern zoology and ethnology. The findings of numerous investigators are indicating that consciousness (by which I mean a non-rational, but cognitive awareness; thought lacking the faculty of self-awareness) is not something unique to mankind, but may well have evolved, or something very like it, several times during the course of biological evolution on earth. Many of the attributes once claimed as distinguishing man from the animals - abstract thought, problem-solving faculties, the tendency to spend much time engaged in the seemingly pointless exercise of play - are now being detected by animal behavioural scientists. Ravens can be trained to select food from bowls indicated by different numbers of dots; squirrels exhibit a remarkable ingenuity in circumventing complex obstacles placed in the way of their food; chimps have been observed to paint pictures in such a serious and contemplative manner that a rudimentary form of æsthetics has even been postulated.<sup>20</sup>

We find then that the tradition of a poetic phase of language, which underlies the myth of the Adamic tongue, and therefore much of the tradition of magic as encountered in history and folktales, may indeed have an anthropological basis. Furthermore, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that, as language and consciousness are likely to develop hand-in-hand, the urge to sub-create, linguistically and through other creative media, may well have played a major part in bringing about the revolution of self-awareness in man. We have at least some sound scientific evidence with which to assess the first part of the anthroposophist's case, and that of the Romantic tradition to which it runs parallel. The theological aspects of Anthroposophy were not important enough to compromise Tolkien's Catholicism; Steiner's system does not advocate a particular form of worship, enabling practising Christians to take up its doctrines with a clear conscience. Indeed Tolkien's faith enabled him to receive

Barfield's views more sympathetically than could the then agnostic Lewis, who found the esoteric aspects of Steiner's philosophy distinctly unpalatable. But it is Barfield's relation of these principles to questions of philology that are our chief concern. Beginning in a short essay in 1922, in which he attempted to trace the history and meaning-shifts of the word *ruin*, his research led eventually to the publication of Poetic Diction in 1928. The book takes issue with Max Müller's view that archaic language related literally to physical objects and only later acquired its poetic content in an explosion of metaphoric thought, the 'mythologizing of language' that Steiner has called a disease.

Barfield maintains that man's primal language was a mythic language and only later did single mythic concepts divide into literal and metaphysical components. He points to two of the best known examples of words from ancient languages that have proved notoriously difficult to translate owing to their apparently overdetermined meaning. In Greek, Latin and Hebrew the words for 'spirit', respectively *pneuma*, *anima* and *ruach*, also appear to mean both 'breath' and 'wind'.<sup>21</sup> Müller's position would be that the Indo-European root from which they derive would have originally denoted the physical phenomenon of wind, and this would subsequently be associated with the breathing process on physical terms. Only at a later stage of man's development, when he began to formulate metaphysical concepts by analogy, was the word extended to cover the *Aberglaube* of 'spirit'. Barfield however argues that the original concept denoted by the root word was identical with none of our concepts of 'wind', 'breath' or 'spirit', but was such that it embraced all of them inseparably. It might be described as a concept of '*wind-spirit-breath*', except that this hyphenated form implies that it is - for us - a composite concept, whereas its total unity, its indivisibility, is its chief characteristic. The speaker of such a language could never grasp the three distinct terms that are apparent to the modern reader, and conversely it is impossible for us to genuinely comprehend the unified concept. Furthermore the difference does not remain apparent at the conceptual level only; such a mythologized language would automatically determine a



mythologized perception. To the *primaeval* subject there would be no distinction to be made between the wind in the trees, the breath in his nostrils and the spirits of his worship. Thus we are able to glimpse, through a glass darkly, as it were, something of the experience of Vico's poetic phase of language. Man, the breather, is tied irrevocably to the gods and to the winds by which they make their presence felt; pre-lapsarian man is at one with creation and Creator. But the development of conceptual thinking in the Classical period firmly sundered Man from the rest of creation, wrenching apart subject and object by dividing the metaphoric concepts into sub-concepts, with the metaphysical on one side ('spirit') and the physical on the other ('wind'). What makes Barfield's claim even more compelling is the fact that Hebrew ruach, as part of a Semitic language, does not derive from the same Indo-European root as its Greek and Latin counterparts, and yet possessed exactly the same trifold conceptual reference.

The Greek *λογος* is most famously translated as 'Word', in the opening chapter of St John's Gospel, but has variously been rendered as 'reason', 'idea', 'divine harmony' and 'order' (in the sense of the opposite to chaos). Certainly it does carry the literal meaning 'word', but Barfield's theory reunites the literal with the metaphysical.<sup>22</sup> Thus we can test Barfield's theory against other ancient names and words; the Indo-European root of the word God, for example, dieus, from whence comes Zeus, the Scandinavian war god Tyr (preserved in 'Tuesday') and Jupiter (originally Dyaus pitar = 'Father Dyaus', or 'Zeus'). The root appears to mean 'shining heavens' and 'daylight', and we might observe that Norse Tyr was also god of the sky. If Barfield is correct, the synthesized concept of divinity and the brightness of the sky was the first to develop in the primitive mind, the two not being separated until the capacity for cognitive thought developed.

However, even though the modern critic would retrospectively observe that language operating in this manner is metaphoric, we can do so only by virtue of the fact that we have gained since those far off times the ability to separate the abstract from the concrete. The functioning of poetic language may be labelled metaphorical from



without, employing a hieratic metalanguage, but *within its own terms* the concept of metaphor is redundant, since it implies the identity of an actual object with an abstract one. In its own poetic terms, the poetic language functions literally. The Anthroposophic theory of linguistic development thus carries the implication that Man's perception of the world is inextricably bound up not only with language but also with myth; *"words are expressed myth, the embodiment of mythic concepts and a mythic world view. The word myth, in this context, must be taken to mean that which describes man's perception of his relationship to the natural and supernatural worlds."*<sup>23</sup>

The impact that Barfield's work had on Tolkien cannot be overestimated if one is to arrive at an understanding of his own fiction. Hard upon the publication of Poetic Diction, C.S. Lewis reported to Barfield:

*"You might like to know that when Tolkien dined with me the other night he said ... that your concept of the ancient semantic unity had modified his whole outlook and that he was always just going to say something in a lecture when your conception stopped him in time. 'It is one of those things,' he said, 'that when you've once seen it there are all sorts of things you can never say again.'"*<sup>24</sup>

The entropic process by which the organic, unified, mythologized primal concept breaks down with man's developing self-consciousness, first bifurcating into physical and metaphysical terms which stand as no more than analogues to each other, and then further fragmenting into increasingly sophisticated concepts, is used by Tolkien as both the basic structural pattern and the dominant theme of The Silmarillion, as Dr Flieger has demonstrated in great detail in one of the best studies of Tolkien available.<sup>25</sup> The Light of Ilúvatar in the *Ainulindalë* is just such a primal concept as Barfield postulates; it comprises the divine presence of the creator, Ilúvatar, with the attributes of physical light as we know it. Within the *mythos* however the two cannot be distinguished. Tolkien is attempting to

revitalize our language by taking a familiar term, 'light', which we understand in electro-magnetic terms, and re-mythologizing it. He does this not merely by saying that it is like God, nor even by employing the metaphor that the light is God, as we understand metaphor, but rather by creating a Secondary pre-lapsarian world inside which language functions as it did in its poetic phase, i.e. by claiming that the light within the created world is *literally* identical with the Godhead. Within the Halls of Ilúvatar no conceptual distinction can be made between physical light and the light of the Divine Presence. The principle is typified by the Flame Imperishable, the creative impulse with which the creator summons into being, and sustains, Creation. The subsequent narratives illustrate the entropic tensions which pull apart the unified concept as we see the Valar light the world with two great lamps, which are cast down by Melkor, their unchecked divine fires scorching much of the world; this is followed by the germination of the two great light-giving trees of Valinor, which unlike the lamps which lit up the world, illumine only the Undyinglands, and are in their turn destroyed by Melkor; from the last blossom and fruit of the respective trees are fashioned the sun and the moon, which constitutes a further diminution of the light. Middle Earth is once more illuminated, but is plunged into darkness every night, whereas before there had been constant light. Eventually the last echos of the divine light are encapsulated in the three jewels known as the Silmarilli; the light has diminished to the point where one individual, the elven prince Fëanor, can claim it as his possession. The light that was originally identical with the Divine Presence is reduced to the most physical of objects, trapped inside a crystal, a mere artifact. Ilúvatar is still in his heaven, but light has become a physical phenomenon that can be related to him only by analogy; significantly his created children, the Elves and Men, are now as far from him as ever.

The diminution of the Light is the major theme of The Silmarillion, as well as its carrying its symbolic spiritual message. But Tolkien repeats the Anthroposophic fragmentation pattern many times over in many different forms. Flieger has shown that the development of the elvish languages and dialects conforms precisely

to the pattern. Starting off as an onomathic reaction to the light of the stars, the first sight that met the eyes of the awakening Elves,<sup>26</sup> their language fragments and diminishes. The entropy begins almost immediately as, having uttered their first word spontaneously, the elves are able to reflect on the event and to name themselves the Quendi, 'the speakers'; i.e. the first utterance which confirms the integration of subject and object gives way almost immediately to a conceptual self-awareness that disjoins subject from object.

Even the otherworldly characters of the Valar are drawn according to the concept of linguistic re-mythologizing. The King of the Valar is Manwë, surnamed *Súlimo*, the 'Breather', or 'Lord of the Breath of Arda', and his especial province is that of the winds and Upper Air; this, along with his exalted spiritual status, dramatically combines the trifold primal concept of 'wind/spirit/breath' just as Barfield has described it.

Inherent in Barfield's thesis is the principle of fragmentation or division; division of consciousness separating subject and object, division of language into the concrete and the abstract. The principle, as an adjunct of the act of creation itself is found in a wide variety of religious traditions. When Tolkien's world is given actuality by having the Flame Imperishable, the essence of Being, set at its heart, it is still, like the earth of Genesis, 'without form and void', until those of the Ainur called the Valar, 'the Powers', descend into it and begin the great labour of shaping it in accordance with the Vision of the Great Music, so that it might be ready for the coming of Elves and Men. The Valar therefore function as demiurges, in effect, angelic sub-creators. The concept of the *δευουργος*, first described by Plato, is common to most polytheistic creation myths. Greek Zeus, as the grandson of the Sky, Ouranos, and therefore a created being, is to all intents and purposes a demiurge, as are the Egyptian holy foursome, Set, Isis, Osiris and Nephthys, sent to govern the earth on behalf of the supreme transcendent deity whom the inhabitants of the Nile Delta considered so great as to be above naming and worshipping.<sup>27</sup> The most characteristic descriptions of the demiurgic personality are however to be found in the writing of the Hellenic Gnostics, particularly the school of Valentinus, who



describes Ialdabaoth - who is clearly identified with the Yahweh of *Genesis* - a creature of the transcendent Godhead or Pleroma, who, infected by Achamoth (Corruption), creates the physical world, which he hopes to preside over as sole God and source of all things.<sup>26</sup> Within the Gnostic conception the Demiurge is invariably the originator of the duality of our existence, introducing physical substance into the erstwhile wholly spiritual world, and earning for himself in his rôle as the Devil the title of *Rex Mundi*. As Achamoth is held to inhere in base matter, the Demiurge is the agent of plurality and division. This function is indicated by the etymology of the term; demiourgos derives from the Proto-Indo-European roots 'dā-', to divide, and 'werg', to do, signifying 'to do by dividing'.

In *The Silmarillion* there is no suggestion that any of the Valar - with the exception of Melkor - are at all corrupt, nor that there is anything evil in physical substance - a point I shall discuss further in Chapter Six. But the principle of division as encountered in Barfield's thesis, is well attested as an instrument of cosmogony. Melkor, the demonic demiurge, is the great Divider. Ilúvatar's bringing forth the Ainur as the offsprings of his thoughts constitutes the first creative, and therefore plural, act, and Melkor is significantly the foremost among the Ainur, having "been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren." He is the first to leave the Divine Presence, venturing by himself into the Void, "the outer blackness wither Ilúvatar had not yet turned the light of his face", seeking the means to create in his own right. The result of these dark broodings is to introduce discordant harmonies into the theme of the Great Music upon his return. Perhaps it would not be to stretch a point to suggest that Melkor was also author of the first musical *division*. Seventeenth century compositional tutors have chapters devoted to the composition of the early baroque division, which differs from its contemporary namesake in being less a series of variations on a theme as the evolution of a melody over and in conjunction with a constant ground bass.<sup>27</sup> Tolkien's musical creation myth provides a notable allegory to the process, as his three themes develop over the ground bass of Melkor's atonal self-assertion. The French term for



the musical division, *double*, emphasizes the dualistic nature of division as a function of creation.

Division as a principle of Creation is inherent in the elaborate mythology of William Blake, alluded to typically as '*Daughter of Beulah, Sing/ His fall into Division and his resurrection to Unity*'.<sup>30</sup> It also occurs as the *Shevirath ha-kelim*, the 'breaking-apart-of-the-vessels', which Harold Bloom tells us is the second of the three phases of Creation according to the Lurianic Qabbalah.<sup>31</sup> It is preceded by *Zimzum*, the contraction of the Creator, so that, in partially withdrawing his presence, the plurality of the bringing into being of an object not identical with himself is enabled, an idea that first achieved currency as a theodical argument of Augustine. The breaking-apart-of-the-vessels, Creation as catastrophe, is followed by *Restitution, or Tikkum*; Man's creative contribution to the divine Creation, which is to say, the point at which sub-creation takes over from creation. Luria foreshadowed Tolkien in the view of artistic sub-creation as a continuance or completion of the cosmogonic act, which brings me to the key question of what, in mythic terms, sub-creation actually involved for Tolkien; what metaphysical process did he conceive of taking place during the act of creative writing?

### The Mythic Status of Sub-creation

Tolkien's sub-creative method, then, derives partly from Barfield's entropic theory of language, the basic action of which is creation of new concepts through division. This action describes not only Tolkien's method, but also his subject, as Flieger has shown. The basic principle of sub-creation has already been touched upon; namely that Man, as *imago dei*, feels a profound need to create for himself, in emulation of his Creator. In doing so he aspires to participate in the on-going process of divine creation. Ever since Aquinas there has been a widespread theological belief that the universe is no mere mechanism, made and set in motion by the Creator and then left to its own devices, but rather is fully dependent upon a deity who sustains the world in one atemporal and continuous act of Creation. If the

cosmogonic moment is held to be in progress even now, it follows that anything made by any creature must ultimately be made by God via the agency of the creature. Sub-creation is therefore, as Luria's *Tikkun* stage suggests, mankind's contribution to the Creation of the World.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth noting, as did Lewis, that Tolkien's concept of sub-creation works equally well within a Neo-Platonist context. Since Plotinus tells us that natural objects are but themselves imitations of universal, transcendent Forms, *"the arts need not simply imitate what they see, but can re-ascend to those principles from which Nature herself is derived."*<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to imagine a more succinct statement in neo-platonist terms of the doctrine of transcendence of the fallen world through sub-creation that has been the subject of the last three chapters.

This is the mythic infrastructure with which Tolkien made sense of the mystery of human creativity, and it is in this context that his suggestions that the rôle of the writer is that of a kind of divine amanuensis were made. But that is not to say that Tolkien believed the words he wrote were simply conveyed to him in their entirety from some numinous inner realm. His accounts of the progress of the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* in his wartime letters to Christopher Tolkien, make it very clear that the writing process was for him every bit as difficult as for any other writer, this being one of the reasons why that novel took such a long time to finish. However almost all other writers at some time or other experience a mysterious sense of the text taking over, departing from the intended plan; the introduction, apparently from nowhere, of new material and characters; a frequent sense of not having written the finished work. Tolkien seems to have been especially sensible of this phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> Because of his unshakable conviction that his work was 'true' in the sense that, like authentic myth, it embodied certain human truths, he began to think of his inventions as having a reality beyond their fictionality. This was, as Carpenter puts it, "not because he had lost his wits or sense of proportion",<sup>35</sup> but because of his faith in the theological dimensions of sub-creation.

When confronted with a problematic elvish name, or a narrative anomaly in his texts, he typically would not say "*This is not as I wish it to be; I must change it.*" Instead he would approach the problem with the attitude "*What does this mean? I must find out*"<sup>36</sup>

"The tale," he says of The Lord of the Rings, "grew in the telling"; his original intention having been to produce a much slimmer work. For a long period the Fellowship were stranded in Moria by Balin's tomb, with Tolkien unable to progress any further, though he was still reporting to Christopher that he was nearing the end of the story. In the completed novel, however, this sticking point falls considerably less than one third of the way through the whole. Again, in December, 1942, he reports that he has reached Chapter XXXI, and will need six more chapters to finish, whereas it actually required a further thirty-one chapters.<sup>37</sup> Comments on the work in progress such as the following are typical;

*A new character has come on the scene (I am sure I did not invent him, I did not even want him, though I like him, but there he came, walking into the woods of Ithilien): Faramir, the brother of Boromir \_ and he is holding up the 'catastrophe' by a lot of stuff about the history of Gondor and Rohan (with some very sound reflections no doubt on martial glory and true glory): but if he goes on much more a lot of him will have to be removed to the appendices.*<sup>38</sup>

There is little doubt that, for Tolkien, what I have called the mythic status of sub-creation was as real, and as much an article of his faith, as his belief in the cosmogonic myth of which it is both part and sequel. The draft letter to Peter Hastings quoted in the introduction of this study <sup>39</sup> admits us to other details of Tolkien's conception of the process. Hastings, another devout Catholic, had written to Tolkien taking him to task over certain details in the first two volumes of The Lord of the Rings that he saw as evidence of Tolkien's having 'over-stepped the mark in metaphysical matters'. His particular objections are to Tolkien's comments to him personally on the issue of elven reincarnation. "God has not used that device in



any of the creations of which we have knowledge, and it seems to me to be stepping beyond the position of the sub-creator to produce it as an actual working thing, because a sub-creator, when dealing with the relations between the creator and created, should use those channels which he knows the creator to have already used." This point raises the whole question of whether it is possible, within the mythic context described above, for man to create something that does not have its ultimate origin in God. Ilúvatar has told Melkor, the archetypal demonic sub-creator:

*'And Thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined'.<sup>40</sup>*

This then is the orthodox answer. Melkor wanders alone in the Void, seeking the Sacred Flame which confers Being, for only with that can he hope to be, not a sub-creator embellishing the work of his own Maker, but a Creator in his own right. For the dreadful frustration of the artist, which Bloom has named the anxiety of influence,<sup>41</sup> the overwhelming desire to achieve originality, lies in the formula that man is made in the image of God and that means in the image of, not a sub-creator, but a Creator. But Tolkien enters into more detail in his reply to Hastings, first making their respective positions perfectly clear:

*We differ entirely about the relation of sub-creation to Creation. I should have said that liberation 'from the channels the creator is known to have used already' is the fundamental function of 'sub-creation', a tribute to the infinity of His potential variety, one of the ways in which indeed it is exhibited.<sup>42</sup>*

This is not a deviation from the orthodox line, a conclusion hinted at by the term 'potential variety'. The creative variety of



God is *potentia*, which is made manifest through the agency of the sub-creator. It is therefore absurd to speak, as Hastings does, of adhering to 'the channels the creator is known to have used', since through artists all conceivable channels are being explored and deployed in the glorious continuous act of Creation. As Tolkien continues :

*I should have thought it a curious metaphysic - there is not one but many, indeed potentially innumerable ones - that declared the channels known (in such a finite corner as we have any inkling of) to have been used, are the only possible ones, or efficacious, or possibly acceptable to and by Him!*

This principle allows the sub-creator a great degree of imaginative freedom and permits a far wider ranging exploration of spiritual issues than formal theological discourse. We therefore find that it is no heterodoxy in Tolkien that in his created world, mortality is not a punishment for Man's Fall, but, quite the contrary, the specific gift of Ilúvatar to men, that they might escape the interminable weariness of the immortal elves, and the constant anguish that they suffer as unchanging beings in an ever-changing world. What is thus 'bad Theology' in the Primary world - and we have already seen how important the myth of the Fall is to Tolkien in other respects - is perfectly legitimate in the Secondary world so long as it fits consistently, and thereby allows the sub-creator to examine such loaded concepts of mortality and eternal life, punishment and reward, at an objectifying remove. Mortality, as has been already stated, was one of Tolkien's principal thematic interests and through his myth-making he is able to turn conventional thinking on the topic on its head by holding it up and examining it from the other side. 'Fairy-stories are made by men not fairies,' he says, 'The human stories of the elves are doubtless full of Escape from Deathlessness'<sup>43</sup> By inverting the conventional theological outlook, he is able to make a pertinent point about man's disinclination to count his blessings, showing Ar-Pharazôn rejecting his creator's greatest gift and bringing disaster upon the heads of his people by

challenging the Valar in his lust for deathlessness.

The sub-creative doctrine, as developed by Tolkien, does have some historical precedents. I have had several occasions in the course of this study to refer to the remarkable work of Giambattista Vico, but it is in the area of sub-creation that his greatest relevance to Tolkien lies.<sup>44</sup> Vico argued that only in making a thing can one ever hope to truly understand it. Man is the originator of social laws, which are therefore intelligible to him. Furthermore, contemporary man may be separated from another culture by the considerable distance of centuries and of space, but he is still capable of achieving a proper understanding of this culture since it was produced by human minds. Being possessed of such a mind, modern man is capable of imaginatively entering into the alien culture and thereby effecting an understanding of it - in effect, by re-creating it. It was this principle that, half a century later, was rediscovered by Herder and the subsequent German Romantics, and used as a reaction to absolutist French classicism, forming the basis of theories of æsthetic and social historicism that remain with us to this day. *Poesis*, therefore, the act of making, has, according to Vico, an heuristic function, at least with epistemological regard to the human social, political and artistic world. Can it, as Tolkien would hope, be used to effect a narrowing of the gulf between Fallen Man on the one side and God and Nature on the other? Vico would reply in the negative; he makes the point that nature was created by God, not man, and therefore, while entirely comprehensible - we must assume - to the deity, the laws of nature, while *knowable* to mankind, are not *intelligible*: a distinction that recalls Barfield's point that the physical causes of a thing are in nowise the same as its 'meaning'. At this point we recall Tolkien's devotion to nature - some might suggest his obsession with it; the love with which he created each detail of the vast landscapes through which his characters move; his deep loathing for modern, industrial society, which struck as much of a chord with the reading public of the 1950s and '60s as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its comparable distaste for the urban, had in the 1930s; his concern to represent the 'inner life' of trees; his frequent use of trees and leaves as metaphors for imagination and

stories. For Tolkien, I would suggest, nature is a manifestation of God, and anything that effected a closer integration of man and his natural environment must be invested with a religious significance, amounting as it does to an act of redemption. Tolkien, then, wants to push Vico's theory a stage further. If man can imaginatively recover ancient cultures through the exercise of his imagination, why should he not, as *imago dei*, attain to a new knowledge of nature by imaginatively sub-creating it. Tolkien seems to be attempting just this in passages such as:

*As Frodo prepared to follow him, he laid his hand on the tree beside the ladder: never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself.<sup>45</sup>*

Thus is the sub-creator able to remake nature in his own image.

But the mythic sub-structure of Tolkien's belief in sub-creation need not be confined to the arena of the arts or æsthetics. Mircea Eliade has produced evidence <sup>46</sup> that suggests that Tolkienian sub-creation is a cultural sophistication of a very basic psychological need to regenerate ourselves, our society, the very world around us, by abolishing history and starting our lives all over again.<sup>47</sup> This was achieved in early cultures, Eliade argues, not once in a lifetime but many times over, at the New Year, at the times of births, marriages, deaths and harvests, by the periodic ritual enactment of the cosmogonic moment. This, in a mythological consciousness such as Cassirer and Barfield argue for, would amount to an actual re-Creation. In sloughing the past, all mistakes and guilts are shed with it, allowing society and the individual to dispense with their unproductive emotional baggage and begin life anew. Thus a cyclic view of history, according to Eliade, is most natural to man. 'History', as we usually think of the term, as a linear progression, was not 'invented' until the rise of the Israelitish culture, which



defines itself through the principle of its God acting within the temporal continuum through them, His chosen people, and therefore requires a rectilinear, progressive history to be perceived and remembered. The Christian world has inherited the necessity for history, having in the Incarnation a central doctrine of the single, unique intervention of God's presence within human affairs, transforming the significance of history once and for all. Concomitant with the rise of linear history within the Judeo-Christian tradition is the very public rise of concepts of iniquity and guilt (c.f. the admonishments of the Prophets), sin, forgiveness and redemption, along with the foregrounding of individual conscience. The loss of the convenient social mechanism of ritual re-Creation also removes the mythic way of dealing with these issues.

But before we complacently bracket this need for the abolition of the past as an inherently primitive trait, we might look at a couple of examples of inaugurating new beginnings. The Roman Catholic confessional provides one of the most striking examples, wherein the subject periodically submits to a process that involves verbal formulae (mythos) and rigorously prescribed symbolic actions (the ritual penance), after which, doctrinally at least, the conscience is made clear by the absolution of sin and the subject is free to begin life again as though it were the first day of their lives. The past is effectively abolished. A prosaic version of the process may be observed in modern western New Year rituals; the seeing out of the Old Year, the welcoming of the New with attendant symbols (coal, bread, whisky); the resolutions which intend to leave bad habits behind once and for all.

If Eliade is correct in his thesis, and the wide ranging examples he presents in evidence are comprehensive, we can see that at least part of the psychological impetus of Tolkienian sub-creation is a deep seated need to abolish the past by creating the world anew, to transcend our fallen condition, or at least to experience such a transcendence vicariously by the creation of a Secondary world. Indeed what I have called the myth of sub-creation explicitly allows for the elongation of the cosmogonic moment into an all-encompassing, ever-present Now. It is tempting to see this impulse as the



corollary in the experience of the artist to what Tolkien has claimed is experienced by the reader as Escape. In this light Tolkien's chronic inability to finish The Silmarillion during the last years of his life, despite publishers' eagerness for the manuscript, appears as a psychological reluctance to allow his world to pass away by submitting it to the past. That he wasted weeks pondering the exact form of an elvish word or name rather than completing the tales and chronologies shows a sub-creator lovingly sustaining his sub-creation in a continuous act of sub-creating.

## Notes

1. F.R. p339
2. See Introduction to current study.
3. Sites of pagan worship were frequently selected for the early churches, a practise sanctioned in England by Augustine himself. Conversion was often made easier for the uneducated by blurring the distinctions between the old and the new religion, as had been found in Rome in Constantine's time, when the Church received a surge of converts by Christianity's adoption of some of the trappings of the hugely popular cult of Sol Invictus (moving the Sabbath from the old Jewish Saturday to the 'day of the Sun', for example, (La. *Dominica* being a title of Sol), and the advent of the corona or halo in Christian art, taken directly from the Sun cult).
4. E. Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature p. 191
5. *ibid.* p. 192
6. H. Carpenter, J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography, pp. 150-1
7. N. Frye, Creation and Recreation, p. 7
8. *ibid*
9. O. Barfield, Poetic Diction, p. 90
10. Brewer, The Historic Notebook.
11. Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, 69-11 (trans. Faulkes, pp. 3-5 Dent 1987)
12. Myths usually categorized as ætiological myths, of which there is a huge corpus, probably for this very reason; that the myth confers an 'otherly' authority upon a contemporary institution or practice.
13. Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 39
14. *ibid.* pp. 44-5
15. Jung & Kerényi, The Science of Mythology
16. Frye, Creation and Recreation, p. 6
17. Rudolf Steiner, Mystics of the Renaissance, pp. 27-8 (quoted Carpenter in The Inklings, p. 36n.

18. Steiner in fact posits four phases. It may be objected that I have disingenuously opted to treat the second and third as though they were one and the same in order that the Anthroposophical dialectic will the more readily mirror that of Michael Edwards. However Steiner's second phase, 'the age of the Intellectual Soul', which he claims corresponds to the Græco-Roman period is in fact a transitionary phase in which the objectivisation of language and consciousness comes about, resulting in the current phase, 'the age of the Conscious Soul. Both, then, are in the context of my argument, merely subdivisions of 'fallen-consciousness', and for that reason I treat them as a single dialectic phase. It was for the same reason that, in Chapter Two, I subsumed the second Viconian phase of language (the heroic, or hieratic) to which Steiner's 'age of the Intellectual Soul' precisely corresponds, into the third, fully objectivised phase.
19. Cassirer, quoted by Barfield.
20. Barfield On The Rediscovery of Meaning.
21. Barfield Poetic Diction, pp.79-81
22. *ibid*.
23. Flieger, Splintered Light, p.37
24. Carpenter, The Inklings, p.42
25. Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World, Eerdmans 1983
26. *Sil*. p.26.
27. Such as that indicated in the Temple inscription at Sais.
28. B. Walker, Gnosticism: Its Influence and History. The likely derivation of the name Ialdabaoth ('Child of the Void', from Hebrew *yalds*, 'child'; *bohu*, 'void') is suggestive of Tolkien's Melkor-figure.
29. Coperario's composition tutor, for example.
30. Blake, The Four Zoas, Night the First, ll.20-21
31. Bloom, Introduction to A Map of Misreading, p.5
32. The concept of *Tikkun* also has interesting implications when considered in conjunction with reception theories of aesthetics.

33. C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century p. 320 (Oxford)
- 34 He refers in one instance to 'the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself'. (Letters p. 253)
35. Carpenter, Biography p. 102.
36. *ibid.*
- 37 . Letters p. 58
38. *ibid.* p. 79
39. *ibid.* pp. 187-196
40. *Sil.* p. 17.
41. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence
42. Letters, pp. 187-196.
43. O.F.S. p. 61
- 44 1. An immediate similarity between Tolkien and Vico is apparent in

Auerbach's description of the latter:

*'He combined an almost mystical faith in the eternal order of human history with a tremendous power of productive imagination in the interpretation of myth, ancient poetry, and law.'* (*Scenes*, p. 190).

He anticipates Barfield's view of primitive man as having 'no faculties of reasoning; they only had very strong sensations and a strength of imagination such as civilized man can hardly understand'. (*Scenes* p. 191)

45. F.R. p. 456
46. Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return
47. Edwards, of course, suggests that this is precisely the reason we feel the need to tell stories.



## PART TWO

### CHAPTER FOUR:

#### TOLKIEN AND THE LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE

In the first part of this study I have argued that the writing process was for Tolkien a religious act, in the sense that his æsthetic philosophy, centred on his concept of sub-creation, is inseparable from the Judeo-Christian doctrine of Creation, and in that for him the creative process ritualizes those very mythic patterns that are invariably the very stuff of religion in its wider sense. I want to turn now to the second part of my thesis that Tolkien may properly be regarded as a religious writer; the assertion that his major works aspire to the status of, and to some extent succeed in functioning as, quasi-scriptural texts.

Before proceeding further it will first be necessary to agree on precisely what is meant by the term 'scripture', let alone 'quasi-scripture'. Derrida's claim, that there is nothing outside the text, carries the implication that everything is *écriture*, or 'writing'. His meaning is that it is impossible to engage in any meaningful discourse about literature, society or culture without the automatic assumption of the written word. Etymologically we find the English 'scripture' identical to the French *écriture*; everything, then, is scripture. This of course, for all its intrinsic interest, is too broad a definition to be of much help to our enquiry, though we will do well to note in passing the presence of the medieval concept of the all human creative activity constituting a written gloss of the

divine action of Creation. Derrida effectively, and characteristically, inverts the hierarchy, subverting Creation, or the created world as present to our senses, to the status of a gloss on the text.

A narrower definition of scripture confines the term to specific holy texts within the Judeo-Christian tradition; the use of the term in the context of other religious traditions is, or was initially, entirely analogous. But even within the Judeo-Christian context we quickly note that a distinction is made between scriptural texts and other holy writings such as the works of the Church Fathers. While, for example, the Clementine epistles are considered documents of great authority, and in practice, during the Middle Ages were cited with almost as much confidence in their weight as the Pauline Epistles, they have never been accorded the status of a sacred text, by which I mean a text sacred in itself, *qua* text, as opposed to a text which merely describes concepts and events deemed to be of a sacred character. What then, we may ask, makes the *Revelations of St John* scriptural, but not The Shepherd of Hermas? <sup>1</sup> The pragmatic answer, from the late second century A.D. onwards, has been that the former is canonical, while the latter is not. What constitutes scriptural status, it would seem, is a council decision. The inclusion of Revelations in the New Testament canon was fiercely opposed in certain quarters, while a sizable lobby pressed, and still does, for the inclusion of The Shepherd, but a council decision to include one and exclude the other effectively consigned the very beautiful The Shepherd to popular oblivion.<sup>2</sup> But that is not to say that the status of scripture is awarded arbitrarily; its presence as part of an officially endorsed canon admits it into a social context which accords it authoritative status.

It is at this point that certain among the faithful will justify the sacred nature of scripture by defining it as the True Word of God, divinely inspired and impervious to alteration. This ebulliently positive definition is regrettably untenable, since no text can mean anything without interpretation, which requires due regard to context and meaning - such, in effect, is the process that we call 'reading'. The Islamic claim for the Q'ran is of precisely this nature, and carrying the principle to its logical conclusion, no official

translations from the Arabic are endorsed and theology as we know it - the interpretation of God's intent chiefly through the medium of the scriptures - is virtually unknown among orthodox muslims. The problems of translation that have beset the Judeo-Christian scriptures are legion, and many people today select their edition of the Bible on chiefly æsthetic rather than theological grounds, expressing a typical preference for the richness of the language of the Authorized King James Version, or for the simplicity of the Good News, and so on. Indeed if we were to regard scripture as the divinely orchestrated word of God we should have no choice but to emulate the Muslims and return to the original languages, in this case Hebrew and Greek. Even then we should be far from receiving holy wisdom, for if Barfield's thesis on the disintegration of language into concrete and abstract terms is accepted, it will prove impossible for the modern mind ever to properly grasp what was originally intended by words denoting central concepts like *ruach Elohim* or *λογος*. Literal fundamentalism is therefore not a serious option so far as defining scripture is concerned.

I noted above that scripture becomes scripture when presented to the public in canonical form so that it can establish a social context for itself. The two key elements here are the canon as an approved structure, and the social reception of the canon. A text becomes a sacred text because society permits it to do so. Gabriel Josipovici has drawn attention to the importance of the social foundation of scripture, stressing the continuity of response from childhood to maturity:

*The Bible is unique in that it is the only book in our culture where the child's relations to books is perpetuated into adulthood. Because the Bible is used for public worship the transition we all experience in our lives from an oral to a written culture is blurred. Think how it would effect our response to the stories of Arthur and his knights if we lived in a community which recounted such stories in public every week.<sup>3</sup>*



Two important features of scriptural authority are here located: the unique unquestioning acceptance of authority that is carried over from childhood, and the social pervasiveness of that authority. Here then is at least the beginnings of a definition of scripture. Few children ever have the works of the Church Fathers read to them at nights, and little use is made of the Pseudepigrapha in church or synagogue. Add to these two criteria the third, rather obvious, point that the text must treat of sacred topics such as the relation of God to man, and related issues, and we have a reasonable working definition of Scripture.

How then does Tolkien's work measure up to these criteria? The first thing to say is of course that Tolkien's work is *not* scripture but fantasy fiction (which is not to say that 'scripture' and 'fantasy fiction' are mutually exclusive). But one can imagine a scenario in a post-holocaust world, wherein a re-emerging society attempting to reassemble the shattered and half-forgotten remnants of our own civilization, were to come across a surviving edition of The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. Within these works, extant from a vanished Golden Age, they would find an account of the Creation of the World, the Awakening of Man, along with the birth and eventual loss of his sophisticated elder brothers, the Elves, a deluge myth accompanied by other accounts of cataclysmic upheavals and destroyed civilizations, culminating in an heroic quest to eradicate machine-minded evil. The works would undoubtedly strike various chords in such a decimated society, and it is easy to believe that within a generation or two they might have achieved the status of sacred texts. Since the form of the texts is fixed, its authority could neither be added to nor detracted from; it forms a ready made canon, divided into books: the *Ainulindalë*, the *Valaquenta*, the *Quenta Silmarillion*, the *Akallabêth*, *Of the Third Age and the Rings of Power* and the great sacred poem, *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien himself would be mythologized into a figure akin to - whom? To Wycliffe? Or perhaps St. Paul, or even Moses?

The point is that any literary text may become scripture if a society chooses to adopt it as such and accord it commensurate authority, though Tolkien's work, by its form and content, is



particularly well suited to such an adoption. Of course our own society is far from according Tolkien such status, and Tolkien, the good Catholic, would have been at once horrified and amused at the prospect of it doing so. Randel Helms has drawn attention to the fact that, unlike the staunchly protestant C.S.Lewis (following his conversion), Tolkien, as a Catholic would be sympathetic to the idea that Scripture may be qualified to some degree by the organic tradition that proceeds from it, i.e. the living Church. Holy Writ is not, for him, an inalienable and unchanging monument of paramount religious importance, and it is for this reason that Tolkien is able to regard the Bible as having an æsthetic dimension, one which may legitimately, and without frivolity, be utilized by writers of fiction, a view which was anathema to Lewis.<sup>4</sup> Having said that, to substitute a fiction for the Gospels would, even to Tolkien, have constituted a blatant blasphemy, though he was not above blurring the distinction a little, just enough to allow his text to borrow some of the authority of the genuine scripture. Since no serious attempt at substitution is being made, I have selected the term 'quasi-scriptural' to describe the kind of effect for which Tolkien is aiming.

It is interesting to note, however, that among Tolkien aficionados the three criteria of scripture do apply in a limited sense. First, the subject matter is undeniably of sacred relevance. Secondly, many Tolkien enthusiasts come to his works as children through The Hobbit and progress through The Lord of the Rings which is aimed at a much older audience than the first book, and then to The Silmarillion, notorious as a 'difficult' work, conceived and executed as 'a mythology for England', and directed at adults with an interest in mythography and literary romance. There are few other children's works of literature that have spawned sequels aimed at adults. One reason for this phenomenon may have been the enthusiastic reception The Hobbit met with from adults who wrote to Tolkien demanding more,<sup>5</sup> but the primary reason lies in the shift the narrative of The Lord of the Rings took from the cosy, bourgeois directness of The Hobbit to the grandiloquent language and cosmic themes of The Silmarillion. Tolkien was unable to prevent his narrative veering

towards events more tragic and profound than 'a Hobbit's holiday'; indeed even in writing The Hobbit he had been unable to keep elements of his adult mythology like the Necromancer of Dol Guldur from 'peeping over the edge'.<sup>6</sup> A process parallel to that by which a child grows up with the scriptures, gaining a deeper understanding while yet retaining a child-like awe of their contents is achieved in presenting a childhood hero, Bilbo Baggins, at the beginning of a much longer novel and thereby implanting something of that child-like awe of Story by association into the new work. To accommodate this the first chapters of The Lord of the Rings are written in a style not so very much more mature than that of The Hobbit, but show an increasing maturity with the introduction of Strider, and with him one of the great mythic, indeed theological, themes, that of the disguised King returning to take possession of his kingdom and, Odysseus-like, cleanse it of evil. By Volume Two, The Two Towers, the language has risen to emulate the sonorities of the King James Bible, but throughout the narrative, Frodo, Bilbo's heir, for all his complex dimensions as anti-Faustian hero, struggling with his own free will, has carried with him Bilbo's legacy; not just the Ring, but also the reader's child-like delight at hobbits and their doings. The whole narrative process bears witness to Tolkien's insistence that there is nothing in fairy stories or fantasy that makes them more suited to being read by children than by adults; indeed his argument in favour of the reading of fairy stories being carried over into adulthood, and furthermore that the adult "reads them as tales,...not studies them as curios",<sup>7</sup> sails close to Josipovici's arguments for what makes the Bible a culturally unique text.

The third point is of less immediate concern to our enquiry, since it concerns reactions to the text rather than the functioning of the text itself, though it does provide subsidiary evidence that to some Tolkien's text is indeed capable of functioning as a scripture. The proliferation of Tolkien Societies, to say nothing of the many fantasy role playing games that make use of Tolkien's geographies, peoples and characters, (the whole of which Tolkien himself dismissed as 'my deplorable cultus'), have provided real Tolkien buffs, those whose regard for his work amounts almost to a religious reverence, with a

social context in which the works are thoroughly known and detailed exegetical issues, such as whether or not balrogs have wings, can be taken up with others whose knowledge of the corpus rivals any rabbi's knowledge of the Torah and Targums.

Tolkien is one of the very few twentieth century writers whose works are repeatedly reissued all over the world in lavishly bound luxury editions, an honour otherwise reserved for the Bible, the Prayer Book, the works of Bunyan (in the nineteenth century) and for Shakespeare (a writer generally regarded, particularly in England, as having almost sacred status). Tolkien is read and re-read, and occasionally dipped into as an oracle, as once was the Bible and as '*Robinson Crusoe*' was consulted by Wilkie Collins' Gabriel Betteredge. They have inspired a plethora of dramatizations, musical settings, poems, paintings and articles which though often scholarly sometimes read as though their learned authors actually believe in Middle Earth's "existence as an independent domain", to borrow Pasternak's phrase. All this is evidence that a great many people who have read Tolkien's works simply cannot get the books out of their system. In the introduction to her estimable article on natural religion in *The Lord of the Rings* entitled *Light from an Invisible Lamp*, Catherine Madsen describes her adolescent reaction to the book;

*The book seemed to have far less to do with the New Testament than with the mountains I could see out of my windows, but it moved me to religion. Indeed, having once goaded my parents in an argument into asking me, 'Well, what do you believe?' I ran to my room, brought out the three volumes, and presented them saying, 'I believe this.' It was youthful extravagance; but I have never since been sure that it was false. "*

#### Authority-by-Association: Tolkien's Style

In his introduction to his anthology of Tolkien criticism, Robert Giddings seeks to identify the nature of the impact of Tolkien's



prose on its audience. He advances the hypothesis that it acquires a cultural authority by the subtle manipulation of a 'quality-by-association technique'.<sup>29</sup> He credits Tolkien with the facility of anticipating precisely the major concerns of modern man and providing him with a sublimated enclosed world in which answers to those very problems are ultimately discoverable. This therapeutic process is achievable only in view of the sheer weight of apparent authority that the text exhibits; an authority it appropriates through a process of cultural, largely literary, 'legerdemain'. Tolkien as epic recalls "translations of heroic myths read in childhood"; Tolkien as romance recalls a wealth of accumulated Arthuriana and the English ruralist tradition. Besides the literary dimensions of these categories lies a welter of other cultural associations; the paintings of Millais and Rossetti, and the rugged cliffed landscape of Tintagel are just some of the bright jewels that decorate the Arthurian tradition, while English Ruralism embraces artists from Constable and John Wilson, through Samuel Palmer to Stanley Spencer and John Piper, as well as the music of Elgar, Parry, Vaughan-Williams, Holst, Delius, Butterworth and Bridge. The collective assimilation of all of these established masterpieces, as well as their literary counterparts, is evoked subliminally by Tolkien's prose, thereby appropriating something of their cultural authority, since "a work of art also suggests a cultural authority, a form of dignity, even of wisdom"<sup>30</sup>

All this, as far as it goes, seems plausible enough. Virtually any literary work will inevitably carry overtones of others with which it shares certain features, and it is reasonable to suppose that if the other works are highly regarded, something of their authority will reflect upon the new work. (I must stress that we are here considering subliminal association, not conscious comparison, which almost inevitably reflects ill on the new work at its reception.)

But Giddings' hypothesis is inadequate as a complete explanation of the extraordinary degree of cultural authority displayed by Tolkien's major works and experienced, often to an overwhelming degree, by his readers. One must recall that a large section of the contemporary readership of *The Lord of the Rings*, almost certainly the majority, were never taught Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* as part of



their comprehensive G.C.E. syllabus, and nor did they have the opportunity of reading Graves', or even fellow-Inkling Roger Lancelyn-Green's, Greek Myths. The more rhapsodic sections of Tennyson's version of the passing of Arthur have never thrilled their veins, and The Wind in the Willows is known to them only through the culturally reconstituted interpretations of Walt Disney and televisual puppetry. Many come to the work as young as ten or eleven years old, before any such cultural touchstones as Giddings posits have had time to coalesce. Indeed many pass on, deeply impressed by Tolkien and desperate for a fix of more of the same pure substance, to a wretched thralldom of addiction to inferior imitation; their intake becomes one of trash fantasy novels by formula writers keen to imitate Tolkien's fantasy literature, but who are capable of reproducing only the fantasy genre without any of the serious literary intention. As it is frequently found that these young readers who are ill equipped to respond to Giddings's cultural invocations are the ones most deeply effected by its cultural authority, impelled at its command to learn dwarvish genealogies by rote, commit elvish grammars to memory, and to correct any commentator lax enough to mispronounce a Quenyan name with all the zeal of an evangelical preacher chastising a blasphemous drunk, it cannot be maintained that they are experiencing the prose to any lesser degree than the well-read fellow who can identify every allusion. Whence, then, comes the cultural authority?

In my view Giddings is right to suggest Tolkien's prose operates by a quality-by-association technique, but the association is primarily with that most authoritative of all literary and cultural forms: scripture. There is hardly a child in the western world who is unfamiliar with the sonorous cadences, the stilted syntax, repetitions, inversions, and evocative nomenclature of scripture, be they Christian, Judaic or Islamic. The most deprived child in the poorest of rural villages may be expected to have had at least a rudimentary religious instruction. In the more chaotic urban environment there is hardly an individual, even those who have had no spiritual education at all, who is unfamiliar with scriptural language. Even those who have never given any thought to the

meaning of the words have at least a passing familiarity with scriptural constructions acquired through exposure to cinema and television, or perhaps simply by seeing the man in the Underground wearing a sandwich board reading *Repent ye, the end is nigh*. The Authorized Version of the Bible was translated into the English prose of at least one hundred and fifty years before the date of the translation; it was a matter of policy for the translators to introduce archaisms from an instinctive understanding that the language of the past confers a measure of cultural authority. Any child brought up with the King James will possess a clear understanding of what I intend by Biblical form, though even the most 'approachable', 'user-friendly' modern translations still retain a great degree of 'otherness' in their language that sets it apart from the style of a newspaper or conventional novel. And even the most rational atheist, the most dogmatic logical positivist, will be incapable of separating those language forms from the massive weight of culturally authoritative connotations that have accumulated over the centuries and impregnate our social consciousness at every level. The atheist and logical positivist may choose to regard this authority as sociological or æsthetic, but they are unable to deny its existence.

Furthermore, such a 'borrowing' of scriptural authority is not quite a new thing in the world of literature. Northrop Frye has drawn attention to other examples, and his comments are interesting:

*In European literature...the myths of the Bible have formed a special category, as a body of stories with a distinctive authority. Poets who attach themselves to this central mythical area, like Dante or Milton, have been thought of as possessing a special kind of seriousness conferred upon them by their subject matter. Such poems were recognized, in their own day, to be what we should now call imaginative productions; but their content was assumed to be real, if at one remove, and not only real but about what most concerned their readers. '1*

Yet the poets that Frye cites were openly writing about elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whereas Tolkien is *prima facie* writing about a quite different *mythos*. Frye's term 'at one remove', is significant in that it acknowledges that Dante and Milton's work was of a secondary nature, referring the reader to something outside of itself i.e. to Christian scripture and tradition. By locating his writings in Middle Earth, Tolkien is able to create the illusion of immediacy; his is a primary text that refers to nothing outside itself. And yet, though he does not write 'about' that 'special category' of Biblical myths, his writings still manage to be 'about *what most concerns*' his contemporary readers, while exhibiting the same seriousness as a Milton or a Dante. How does he manage this?

I suggest that the devices by which he does it are principally two. The technique that characterizes *The Lord of the Rings* is one of association of content, that is, of coincidence and manipulation of imagery, and will form the substance of the next chapter. The rest of this chapter is devoted to the association of form, the deliberately 'Biblical-style' language that distinguishes Tolkien's major works - *The Silmarillion* in particular, thereby comprising much of its notorious 'difficulty', as well as the means by which it attains its own greatness.

### *The Silmarillion* and the Emulation of Old Testament Form

In 'Odysseus' Scar', the seminal essay in his book *Mimesis*<sup>2</sup>, Erich Auerbach draws a distinction which defines two basic forms of literary narrative, taking as his respective paradigms an episode from Homer's 'Odyssey' in which the servant Euryclea recognises her disguised master from a scar on his foot, and the 'Genesis' account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. The Homeric text is 'foregrounded'; it involves "fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective."<sup>3</sup> Contrasted with this is the very different style of the Elohist



author of 'Genesis', which Auerbach summarises as "certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming and preoccupation with the problematic."<sup>4</sup>

Auerbach has used this stylistic dichotomy as his starting point for his celebrated examination of the representation of reality in western literature; it is my intention to use this distinction as my starting point for an examination of the Old Testament's formal influence on what we might call Tolkien's 'high style'. It might here be objected that the criteria for an analysis of the artistic representation of reality is an inappropriate point of departure for a study of the fantasy genre. It will be recalled, though, that Tolkien's concept of Recovery suggests imaginative and/or literary expositions in this form may have a larger part to play in our making sense of the apparent reality that surrounds us than the more obviously realistic novels of the twentieth century. However my primary concern is to demonstrate that Tolkien should be considered a religious writer of considerable interest, and I hope to go some way towards accounting for the extraordinary quasi-scriptural status his works seem to have attained in the last two decades, by applying Auerbach's distinction.

My discussion must base itself on The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. The narrative style differs considerably in the two works, as already noted and the style of the The Silmarillion was to prove a great disappointment to many readers of The Lord of the Rings who were expecting more of the same. Details abound, though these are 'factual' rather than descriptive details; we are deluged with a plethora of alien-sounding 'elvish' names, the narrative sweeps from the cosmological level of Creation downwards, though never quite descends low enough for the reader to feel the rich, solid earth of the Shire beneath his feet, and hobbits make no more than the briefest appearance towards the end of the book, and then only in a cursory recapitulation of what we already know from The Lord of the Rings. Indeed it is difficult to regard The Silmarillion as a novel



at all, and there is something in its style which makes one reluctant to assent to the usual description of a long, significant work of fiction which has proved difficult to classify in literary terms as 'a new form of the English novel'; while its content consists of a beautifully original poetic vision, there seems to be nothing 'new' about its form at all; even a cursory reading makes it clear that the text is seeking to emulate scriptural narrative. If one didn't know better, one could almost believe The Silmarillion as we have it to be an old translation of some far more ancient religious text.

The following passage comes from Chapter 23 of the *Quenta Silmarillion*, 'Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin';

But when Tuor had lived thus in solitude as an outlaw for four years, Ulmo set it into his heart to depart from the land of his fathers, for he had chosen Tuor as the instrument of his designs....

And Tuor came into Nevrast, and looking upon Belegaer the Great Sea he was enamoured of it, and the sound and the longing for it were ever in his heart and ear, and an unquiet was on him that took him at last into the depths of the realms of Ulmo. Then he dwelt in Nevrast alone, and the summer of that year passed, and the doom of Nargothrond drew near; but when the autumn came he saw seven great swans flying south, and he knew them for a sign that he had tarried overlong, and he followed their flight along the shores of the sea. Thus he came at length to the deserted halls of Vinyamar beneath Mount Taras, and he entered in, and found there the shield and hauberk, and the sword and helm, that Turgon had left there by the command of Ulmo long before; and he arrayed himself in those arms, and went down to the shore. But there came a great storm out of the west, and out of that storm Ulmo the Lord of Waters arose in majesty and spoke to Tuor as he stood beside the sea. And Ulmo bade him depart from that place and seek out the hidden kingdom of Gondolin; and he gave Tuor a great cloak, to mantle him in shadow from the eyes of his enemies. <sup>15</sup>

In the text preceding this passage all we have been told is that Tuor's father had been slain in battle before his birth, he had been born in the wilds and fostered by the Grey-elves and at the age of sixteen he had been captured and enslaved by the Easterling tribes who serve Morgoth, the satanic Dark Lord, and escaped three years later to live the life of an outlaw, launching guerrilla attacks on the Easterlings. We are given no description of Tuor's physical appearance or character; the former is apparently irrelevant to the narrative, and the latter seems to be adequately if metaphorically indicated by the statement that Ulmo (one of the greatest of the Valar, or angelic guardians of the world, 'afterwards worshipped by men as gods') *had chosen Tuor 'as the instrument of his designs'*, and therefore, we must assume, was of a worthy and unstained character. It should be clear already that Tolkien's text resembles the style of the Abraham legend of Genesis 22:1 far more closely than it does the Homeric technique. And indeed a moment's reflection makes it clear that if either of the two modes described by Auerbach is to hold any promise of attaining to the redemption of language in such a way as Tolkien has postulated, it must surely be the Yahwehist, since such a movement would involve an embracing of the 'inner meaning' as described by Barfield. The Homeric mode, on the other hand, is almost exclusively concerned with the concrete, the literal; its style is to provide as complete a picture of characters, objects and events as possible, leisurely cataloguing all incidental details. Any diversion from the main impetus of the text is foregrounded to create the impression that it is of as much intrinsic importance as any other detail. Thus no character is introduced without an instructive epithet, a discourse on his origin and lineage, his appearance and purpose, where he has just come from, what he was doing there and what it was that brought him onto the scene. All of Homer's gods exist in as concrete terms as the heroes; in the Old Testament, however, the representation of God is never complete, and indeed, considering his nature, never could be complete. He is never described, being an entity beyond description, except through spiritually significant formulations (e.g. *'I am that I am'*, *'a jealous God'*, *'The Lord of Hosts'*). He is never physically or visibly present,

except in some metaphorical trope such as a burning bush. He elects to 'speak' with Abraham, but we are not told what form the communication takes, nor from what 'heights or depths' He speaks. The epiphanic episode is nowhere related to time and space, the action - if the term 'action' may be used to describe a non-spatial phenomenon - becomes infinite and eternal at the spiritual level. And yet we know that Abraham is a man, like us; he is a father of nations, subject to the laws of the physical world. The exchange with God, therefore, must have a location within the spatio-temporal universe. The stylistic device of the author makes it clear that we are to *interpret* the text as relating to the infinite and eternal, the exchange is most properly regarded as one belonging to the world of the spirit. This has a two-fold effect:

1) the text automatically makes a claim to universal authority. This is no mere entertainment or nursery tale, but a narrative of the utmost importance to the human condition, a nodal point of interaction between God and Man, which demands careful consideration.

2) the *form* of the narrative implies the need for interpretation; whereas Homer's text always means no more nor less than it says, it never requires exegesis.

Tolkien's description of the manifestation of the sea-god Ulmo is surely in the scriptural, rather than the Homeric tradition. Ulmo issues from 'a great storm out of the west', but this is not to be equated with Homer's description of Zeus coming from feasting with the Aethiopians. That Ulmo appears from a storm is symbolic of his watery aspect, it is a statement about his angelic or spiritual nature. The violent image of the storm has the secondary psychological aspect of emphasising the greatness, the cosmological proportions, of the event: what it is not is an incidental observation on what the weather was like on the day that Tuor met Ulmo on the beach. This use of *spiritually significant* detail can be seen even more clearly in the assertion that the storm came 'out of the west'; again this is no mere embroidery on where Ulmo happened to be before he came to Tuor, but a loaded statement about his divine nature. 'The West' in Tolkien's world is the home of the Valar, the earthly paradise accessible only to the elves and the origin of the angelic



army that is ultimately to overwhelm the evil realm of Morgoth and destroy his dominion of Middle Earth.<sup>16</sup> In an earlier scene in the *Quenta Silmarillion*, which is obliquely alluded to in the above passage, Ulmo had appeared to the elven king Turgon and foretold the coming of Tuor, reminding him that "*the true hope of the Noldor [the second Kindred of the elves] lieth in the West and cometh from the sea*".<sup>17</sup> All this is reinforced by the mention that Ulmo spoke to Tuor 'as he stood beside the sea'.

As with Tuor, Ulmo is not described, just as Abraham occurs only as a name with a specific history within the text. We read that "*Ulmo had set it in [Tuor's] heart to depart from the land of his fathers, for he had chosen Tuor as the instrument of his designs*"; this, and a few scattered references elsewhere in the text to Ulmo's great love and pity for the elves and men, is all we are told regarding the Vala's intentions. What his 'designs' might be we can only guess, just as Yahweh's intentions in ordering his loyal servant Abraham to sacrifice his only son remain impenetrable.

Further, both accounts work within a framework of prophecies; God has prophesied that Abraham shall be the father of many nations through Isaac, the very child he now orders him to kill; Ulmo's fellow Vala, Náma, has foretold that all the realms in exile of the Noldorian elves will perish as a result of the Oath of Fëanor, which must include the hidden city of Gondolin which Ulmo has instructed Turgon to build and to which he here sends Tuor, as he had himself foretold 'long before'. These hidden intentions set up a perspective that is at once infinitely wide and yet bewilderingly opaque. There is a clear implication that elements outside the narrative are operating upon it, what Auerbach calls the suggestive influence of the unexpressed, an obscurity that would never be tolerated in the Homeric world of total explication and uniform illumination. In literature one finds that prophesy more often than not involves the mode of irony. The coming of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane is richly ironic; Lucius Junius Brutus correctly interpreting the Delphic oracle's prediction that the first man to kiss his mother should achieve supreme power in Rome as ironically intending 'the earth' by the term 'mother'<sup>18</sup> involves a typical prophetic punning; Denethor's



fatal viewing of black-sailed ships sailing up the Anduin, culled as it is from the Theseus legend, reveals the danger implicit in attempting to interpret prophetic circumstances. Prophecy implies the existence of a providence that moulds the events of the *mythos*, frequently involving a misleading factor which confounds expectations with a black sense of humour; this providence invariably transcends the narrative, its agents remaining obscure, in a manner which could not occur in Homer, where the gods, as the obvious agents of providence, if not its source, are concretized as elements within the narrative. The ironic mode, according to Northrop Frye, involves the protagonists being less in quality and degree than ourselves<sup>19</sup>; in the case of prophecy the mode acquires a third element, that transcendent providence which, as the reader is not permitted to participate in its mechanism and intention, stands superior in quality and degree to both reader and fictional protagonists.

By such devices the 'background quality' of the text is built up. Furthermore the very vagueness of the implied unexpressed influences is able to act as a stimulant to the reader's imagination, a principle we noted in our discussion of Tolkien's diction in Chapter Two. We may now observe that we have seen evidence of several of the characteristics Auerbach outlines in the Genesis text in the above passage; the influence of the unexpressed; the paring of all details incidental to the point of the narrative - that point being, within the context of Tolkien's sub-created world, a spiritual one; and the employment of spiritually significant terms - spiritually significant within the context of the *mythos*.

We are able to identify more of Auerbach's criteria. The abruptness he speaks of is demonstrated in the structure of the passage, wherein Tuor arrives in Nevrast and spends the summer there, moves down the coast to Mount Taras and then on to the beach where he encounters Ulmo, all in the space of one paragraph. The manifestation itself, while it remains one of the most enduringly powerful images in the whole work and has proved a powerful stimulant to the imagination of artists, is 'told' in only five and a half lines, three of which are mere reportage of what Ulmo told and gave to Tuor.

The need for interpretation arises in three details of the text, each of which involves a mechanistic obscurity and therefore shifts the narrative into the spiritual domain. The first is the statement that *'Ulmo set it in his heart to depart from the land of his fathers'*. We can say little of this other than noting its mystery, and conceding that the influencing of men at an emotional level remains the prerogative of divinity. Secondly we read that upon looking at the Great Sea, Tuor *'was enamoured of it, and the sound and the longing of it were ever in his heart and ear'*. Tolkien has already described this mysterious sea-longing in connection with the Third Kindred of the Elves, the Teleri, who abandon all intention of dwelling in the Undying Land to the west in order to ply their ships back and forth across the ocean, remaining as close as possible to the deeps, where it is told that echoes of the Great Music of Creation can still be heard. He again makes use of it in *The Lord of the Rings*, wherein Galadriel warns Legolas, a Silvan elf who has spent his entire life in the inland forests of Middle Earth, that his satisfaction with life will be destroyed if ever he comes into contact with the sea.<sup>20</sup> This comes to pass when Legolas hears the cry of gulls near the mouth of the river Anduin and is never able to rest again until he builds a boat and sails into the west. The western sea and the profound longing in can awaken in Tolkien's characters is obviously a metaphor, and it is the reader's task to determine what it is metaphorically indicative of. We find confirmation in the intriguing phrase that follows; *'and an unquiet was on him that took him at last into the depths of the realms of Ulmo.'* What can this possibly mean? Ulmo's realms are the waters of the world, but surely it cannot suggest that Tuor was taken literally into the depths of the ocean. We know that his meeting with Ulmo is not to occur until he has passed the entire summer in a state of 'unquiet' and travelled further south. The text here cries out for interpretation, and at this point we might be tempted to refer the the western mystery traditions concerning the elements, wherein we invariably find water associated with Understanding. To the Qabbalists the element of water is governed by the angel Gabriel, who is depicted bearing a cup symbolizing the magician's head which is

filled with divine understanding from above. Gabriel, of course, is also the Angel of Annunciation; is it an accident that the only Vala who still comes to Middle Earth and speaks with Turgon and Tuor is the watery angel Ulmo? Tuor's summer of inquietude in Nevrast seems to relate to a spiritual descent and exploration of the depths of the personality and the acquisition of wisdom in doing so. He is being prepared for the intense spiritual experience of the epiphanic encounter with Ulmo. This, at least, is the interpretation I offer of the passage, and it may be accepted or rejected out of hand: what is important is that the text *requires* that some interpretation be made. We are subtly made aware that much more is being said than the narrative at its literal level conveys. I should here add that the phenomenon of the sea-longing has a practical thematic function also. Tuor's sea-longing is inherited by his son Earendil, who is destined to take ship across the western sea and secure the forgiveness of the Valar for elves and men, which shall bring the angelic army from the west '*which cometh from the sea*' that Ulmo prophesied to Turgon.<sup>21</sup> But this textual, rather than metaphoric, interpretation is, I would argue, subject to the same rule of spiritual significance which Auerbach describes in the Genesis passage; nothing gets into the text unless it advances the spiritual intention of the writer, and certainly Earendil is a pivotal character in the process of the fall and redemption of the elves, which is the principal theme of *The Silmarillion*.

The third element of mystery to which I referred is Tuor's augur-like interpretation of the flight of the seven swans. Precisely what it was in the sight of the birds which told him 'he had tarried overlong' we can never know, though we might recall that the swan is associated with the Telerian or Sea Elves and would appear to be sacred to Ulmo. Tolkien is effecting a very complex literary manoeuvre in presenting us with a text that is steeped in spiritual significances for mankind in general but which carries the implication that only a wise denizen of Middle Earth will have a wide enough understanding of the schemata to comprehend the symbolic mysteries in their entirety; we as twentieth century readers are persuaded of the comprehensive totality of this spiritual system by being forced



to interpret the text on incomplete data. The association of the swan with Ulmo, for example, encourages us that we are on the right track, but our ignorance of the possible significance of the number seven - the number of the Lords of the Valar perhaps? <sup>22</sup> - or the cardinal point south, brings us up against a brick wall. We are left with an impression of having half understood the mystery that Tuor has fully comprehended and rightly acted upon. Tolkien, so often admired for the wholeness of his meticulously charted world, ironically achieves his vision's most convincing aspect by its incompleteness. Deliberate lacunae accompanied by the confident assumption that the details missing from the text could easily be supplied to the curious reader upon enquiry to the right elf or dwarf, puts interpretive contemplation of our passage on a par with the process of piecing out the significances of the Persephone legend to the Eleusinian mystery philosophy, or the attempted elucidation of the rôle of the sun in the Mithraic cult. We can salvage the broad spiritual meaning, but the relevance of the details are lost to us, though we never doubt that an explanation for all of the details once existed, and could exist again if only we could adequately recover the necessary symbolic vocabulary. As I said earlier, one could almost believe The Silmarillion to be an authentic ancient text.

There remain two more items in Auerbach's list of Old Testament narrative features and these are both exhibited in our passage from The Silmarillion. The first is psychological complexity. Tuor's 'unquiet' which, as we have observed, came upon him by the Great Sea amounts to a complex psychological development which seems to continue throughout the summer until he is ready to go on towards the unknown, a process unthinkable in an Homeric hero where the only psychological development we encounter is the onset of Achilles madness, a black-and-white matter of sanity or insanity, which later passes to restore Achilles to his accustomed character as though nothing had happened. As Auerbach says, "such a problematic psychological situation as this is impossible for any of the Homeric heroes, whose destiny is clearly defined and who wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives; their emotions, though strong, are simple and find expression instantly."<sup>23</sup> Very closely



related to this is the last characteristic, the process of historically becoming. The deserted halls of Vinyamar hark back to a time before the building of Gondolin, when Turgon the High King ruled from this very stronghold; Tolkien reminds us that the arms had been left there 'by the command of Ulmo long before'. Indeed without a strong sense of historical becoming The Silmarillion would be unthinkable, with its central emphasis of the temporal working out of a curse, with the attendant deepening of despair, suffering and resignation bringing the fallen elves to the point wherein redemption is possible.

Enough has been quoted, I hope, to demonstrate that Tolkien's prose, in The Silmarillion at least, is firmly in the narrative tradition of the Old Testament, as defined by Auerbach, and this is surely no accident. The works are more than elements in a literary tradition; they are a deliberate attempt to recreate a spiritual race-history, aspiring to the status of scripture itself. Tolkien of course was a committed Roman Catholic and would never have presumed to concoct an heretical document, a text which in any way compromised or challenged the scriptures he was himself so devoted to. But Tolkien's faith was a complex matter, and in writing what amounts to a personal scripture, the cathartic and pious act of sub-creation, exploring the tragic themes of the fall, redemption, the exercise and authority of power and other issues that had long preoccupied him, but all the while avoiding any doctrinal exposition, he has succeeded in leaving a series of works that have the extraordinary ability to almost convince the reader of their genuine scriptural authority.

As a spiritual race history The Silmarillion is contrived to function within the Secondary created world as scripture does in our own. It must be born in mind that it was not originally intended for publication; indeed Tolkien expressed surprised delight that anyone else could possibly be interested in his little private world.<sup>24</sup> The form in which it was eventually posthumously published is largely due to the editorial skills of his son, Christopher Tolkien, which raises the question as to whether Tolkien himself would have been happy with the pseudo-scriptural overtones of the work as published. The answer must be that he would, for an alternative version of Tuor's

meeting with Ulmo exists, which shows marked differences, and is published in The Unfinished Tales.<sup>25</sup> It takes eleven pages to relate what is described above in one paragraph. Nothing in it contradicts any detail of the *Silmarillion* account, but instead fleshes the narrative out with extensive description, incidental detail and accounts of events not even mentioned in The Silmarillion, such as Tuor's difficulty in finding the Gate of the Noldor, which enabled him to pass under the mountains into Nevrast, and his narrow escape from drowning in a narrow defile in the rising tide. Ulmo is described in grandiloquent terms, and even reveals something of his disagreement with his fellow Valar over their policy of non-intervention in Middle Earth. The account of the terrifying tempest raised by the Storm-maiar Ossë immediately after Tuor and Ulmo's meeting, which is not even mentioned in the first version, is pure, thrilling Homeric adventure. Indeed *The Unfinished Tales* account is no less than a transposition of the Tuor story into the full Homeric mode; it is cast as epic, whereas the *Silmarillion's* version is deliberately written in quasi-scriptural terms. The story was the first of all Tolkien's tales of the Elder Days to be written, begun as early as 1917 while he was serving with the British army in France, and though extensively revised, it was the Unfinished Tales version that had priority. Christopher Tolkien states that "the tale of Tuor and the Exiles of Gondolin (as the 'Fall of Gondolin' is entitled in the early MSS) remained untouched for many years, though my father at some stage, probably between 1926 and 1930, wrote a brief, compressed version of the story to stand as part of The Silmarillion...and this was changed subsequently to bring it into harmony with altered conceptions of other parts of the book."<sup>26</sup> Thus we find that a conscious effort was taken to convert the 'Homeric' version of the tale into one that harmonized with the prevailing scriptural tone of the rest of The Silmarillion.

The Lord of the Rings is much harder to classify in Auerbach's terms than The Silmarillion. Its wide variety of styles mean that in effect it variously employs both mimetic modes at different times. It is possible to select countless passages which resemble the one just analysed from The Silmarillion, and achieve similar results, though I

do not intend to construe them in any depth. Two short samples will do:

In rode the Lord of the Nazgûl. A great black shadow against the fires beyond he loomed up, grown to a vast menace of despair. In rode the Lord of the Nazgûl, under the archway that no enemy ever yet had passed, and all fled before his face.

All save one. There waiting, silent and still in the space before the Gate, sat Gandalf upon Shadowfax: Shadowfax who alone of all the free horses of the earth endured the terror, unmoving, steadfast as a graven image in Rath Dínen.

'You cannot enter here,' said Gandalf, and the huge shadow halted. 'Go back to the abyss prepared for you! Go back! Fall into the nothingness that awaits you and your Master. Go!'

The Black Rider flung back his hood, and behold! he had a kingly crown: and yet upon no head visible was it set. The red fires shone between it and the mantled shoulders vast and dark. From a mouth unseen there came deadly laughter. <sup>27</sup>

and,

*And so they stood on the walls of the City of Gondor, and a great wind rose and blew, and their hair, raven and golden, streamed out mingling in the air. And the Shadow departed, and the Sun was unveiled, and light leaped forth; and the waters of Anduin shone like silver, and in all the houses of the City men sang for the joy that welled up in their hearts from what source they could not tell.<sup>28</sup>*

It should be clear enough that several of the features which typify the Elohist mimetic mode are here present, as well as deliberate scriptural devices like repetition, syntactical inversion and the attribution of high case letters to words like 'Sun', 'Gate' and 'City'. However for all the passage of this type that The Lord of the Rings yields, it supplies half a dozen of the type of the following:



*'So I see,' said Sam. 'No time for washing but time for wall-propping. But see here, Master Sandyman, I've a score to pay in this village, and don't you make it any longer with your jeering, or you'll foot a bill too big for your purse.'*

*Ted Sandyman spat over the wall. 'Garn!' he said. 'You can't touch me. I'm a friend o' the Boss's. But he'll touch you all right, if I have any more of your mouth.'*<sup>23</sup>

Present also in Tolkien's style are the characteristic literary devices of the Old Testament; repetition, partial repetition, inversion, parataxis. The cumulative effect, as in the case of the Bible, is an extraordinarily powerful rhythm that carries the reader through the action. Josipovici, commenting on the style of the opening of *Genesis*, draws attention to the repeated paratactic use of 'and' (wa), rendering the Hebrew in a deliberately crude literal translation:

*At the beginning of created [sic] God the heaven and the earth and the earth was tohu and bohu and darkness on the face of the deep and the wind of God hovering over the face of the waters and God said let there be light and there was light.*<sup>24</sup>

He then discusses the effect of the technique upon the reader, providing it is retained in full in translation;

*The A.V. does much better [here] than any other translation, since it retains the rhythm. Readers of the A.V., as of the Hebrew, find themselves rocked into a mood of both acquiescence and of expectation, grasping 'what is going on' and assenting to it, long before they have understood precisely what this is.*<sup>25</sup>

The paratactic style is to be found throughout *The Silmarillion*, where its power of commanding a rhythmic acquiescence does much to bolster the attitude of secondary belief in a work that is, to a far lesser degree than *The Lord of the Rings*, highly stylized and therefore harder to imbue with what one might call a sympathetic

integrity. In The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit the hobbits provide the point of entry into the Secondary world - they 'mediate', in Shippey's phrase <sup>32</sup> - for the reader who finds he can identify with them in a way in which it is impossible to identify with the Valar, or Fëanor, or even Beren, just as sympathetic identification with Adam, Noah, or for that matter Abraham is impossible. The latter are presented iconically as characters to be contemplated from without; for all we can be imaginatively moved by their predicaments, not least Abraham's dilemma over the sacrificing of Isaac, we cannot know what it feels like to be Abraham, Adam or Noah. In contrast with this is the more open, sympathetic characterization of the New Testament, in which we find vivid psychological portraits of Simon-Peter's crises of faith, the Virgin Mary's maternal hopes and fears, presented in the Magnificat, and Paul's endless self-reproach, which allow access to the Secondary world of the scripture at a more human level. The difficulty of the Old Testament, if difficulty it be, is of course another consequence of the Elohist technique discussed above, and is compensated for by the rhythmic narrative. The first of the following passages is Tolkien's equivalent to the opening verses of Genesis, while the second is chosen from The Silmarillion almost at random;

11 In the beginning Eru, the One, who in the Elvish tongue is named Ilúvatar, made the Ainur of his thought; and they made a great Music before him. In this Music the World was begun; for Ilúvatar made visible the song of the Ainur, and they beheld it as a light in the darkness. And many among them became enamoured of its beauty, and of its history which they saw beginning and unfolding as in a vision. Therefore Ilúvatar gave their vision Being and set it amid the Void, and the Secret Fire was set to burn at the heart of the World; and it was called Eä.<sup>33</sup>

21 Now Ilúvatar knew what was done, and in the very hour that Aulë's work was complete, and he was pleased, and began to instruct the Dwarves in the speech that he had devised for them,

*Ilúvatar spoke to him; and Aulë heard his voice and was silent. And the voice of Ilúvatar said to him: 'Why hast thou done this? Why dost thou attempt a thing which thou knowest is beyond thy power and authority?'<sup>94</sup>*

To illustrate the rhythmic construction I have emphasized not only the 'and's, but other conjunctions such as 'for' and 'therefore' in passage [1]; for all they do not carry the regular chime of the same word throughout the passage, they do serve the same paratactic function of breaking up the flow into short rhythmic units. In passage [2] we can see how well Tolkien has learned the dramatic lessons of Old Testament syntax. The rhythmic 'and's break the flow into short, ascending units, rising to the climax of the deferred major clause; *Ilúvatar spoke to him*. When we reach it we find that it is in fact a false climax, for immediately we encounter, not a full stop, but a semi-colon, followed by *and Aulë heard his voice and was silent*. Aulë, the smith Vala, is engaged in creating the Dwarves, a race not prefigured in the Music, and therefore not divinely sanctioned by Ilúvatar; he therefore proceeds to forge them in what he supposes to be secrecy, but here we see him discovered red-handed by the deity. The dramatic moment of Ilúvatar's revelation of his presence which constitutes the climax of the passage is underscored by the pause that is instituted immediately upon his voice being heard, as Aulë realizes his folly and hangs his head in shame. This dramatic pause corresponds to that which the resting on the Sabbath constitutes in the opening verse of *Genesis*, which Josipovici rightly points to as serving to permit the narrative to renew itself, to recover its vigour for the next round, rather than losing its momentum and petering out, as well as drawing attention to those half-pauses, the 'and's, that have acted as "the ground-bass of the whole". When Tolkien's narrative re-launches itself, the true climax of the passage - Ilúvatar's words to Aulë - are further postponed with *And the voice of Ilúvatar said to him*. The uniqueness of the event of the Creator's voice being heard within Creation is being stresses; with the exception the extreme situations when Manwë, King of the Vala, retires to his mountain throne and consults with



Ilúvatar, the deity never manifests his presence within the created world.

The passage quoted some pages earlier in which Gandalf bars the entry of the Witch-King of the Nazgûl clearly demonstrates Tolkien's use of scriptural repetition and partial repetition. The rhythmic parataxis technique is here again in play, but the strength of the passage chiefly derives from the picking up of a key word or phrase from the previous sentence, and repeating it with embellishment, or to adapt Josipovici's musical analogy, it is as if a key chord from the previous phrase is taken up and made the tonic dominant of the succeeding phrase. Thus we find the following couplings;

'In rode the Lord of the Nazgûl. A great black shadow.../'

In rode the Lord of the Nazgûl, under the  
archway..."

'...all fled before his face / All save one.'

'...sat Gandalf upon Shadowfax /

Shadowfax, who alone of the free horses of  
the earth...'

'Go back to the abyss prepared for you / Go back, fall into  
nothingness / Go'

The two-fold effect of this device is to slow down the narrative, measuring its tread, while at the same time drawing the reader inexorably onwards. The dramatic inelucatability of the encounter is drawn out, raising it to one of the high points of the great battle raging about the city of Minas Tirith. The same technique can be found at work in the Old Testament, for example, in the account of another famous besieged city:

*And the lord said unto Joshua. See, I have given into thine  
hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.*

*And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round*

*about the city once. Thus shall thou do in six days.*

*And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of ram's horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with their trumpets.<sup>35</sup>*

As above we see key words picked up to impel the narrative on:

men of valour / ye men of war,

compass the city / go round about the city / compass the city

seven priests / seven trumpets / seventh day / seven times

priests shall bear...trumpets / priests shall blow with their trumpets

The pattern is even more striking in *Genesis*' account of the Creation, where the pattern begins *God said...God saw...God called* of the first day modulates to *God said...God made...God called* on the second. This configuration is subtly varied by the introduction of innovatory phrases such as *and it was so*, which first occurs in the description of the second day, and is itself taken up and woven into the pattern on the third day.

One final technique of Tolkien's to steer his narrative towards the scriptural deserves mention here. One clear difference between fiction and scripture is that the latter implies that it is in some sense *authentic*, in a sense that a manufactured text such as a conventional novelist would produce is not. The accepted intention of the writer of scripture is to convey something external to himself that he perceives as real; the conventional novelist, however, irrespective of his talents, the veracity of his fiction and any realist technique he may employ, is understood to be engaged in the process of 'making things up'. Tolkien, as ever, takes delight in blurring these distinctions; one of his favourite literary games is to pretend that his fictions are actually authentic histories; his rôle, he would have us believe, has been one of translator rather than

author. He first engages on this conceit, parodying his own rôle as philological antiquarian, in his *Forward to Farmer Giles of Ham*:

An excuse for presenting a translation of this curious tale, out of its very insular Latin into the modern tongue of the United Kingdom, may be found in the glimpse that it affords of life in a dark period in the history of Britain, not to mention the light that it throws on the origin of some difficult place-names...<sup>36</sup>

He was able to carry the game several stages further with the Middle Earth material; thus the contents of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, the various books of The Silmarillion and the poems from The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, as well as some of the information contained in the encyclopædic Appendices to The Lord of the Rings, are reputedly culled from a volume entitled *The Red Book of Westmarch*, to which Tolkien claims to have access. Bilbo Baggins, himself, we are told, was the original author of The Hobbit, and co-author, with Frodo, of The Lord of the Rings. Bilbo was also responsible for the inclusion of the ethnic hobbitish poetry that makes up the *Bombadil* collection. Furthermore, Bilbo was the translator of much of the *Silmarillion* material from the original high Quenyan elvish into the Common Tongue of the West.

Tolkien then continues the scholarly joke by accounting for the provenance of the 'known' copies of *The Red Book* as though it were the object of an authentic antiquarian enquiry:

The original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies of it were made, especially of the first volume...The most important copy, however, has a different history. It was kept at Great Smiles, but it was written in Gondor, probably at the request of the great-grandson of Peregrin, and completed in S.R. 1592 (F.A. 172). Its southern scribe appended this note: *Findegil King's Writer, finished this work in IV 172. It is an exact copy in all details of the Thain's Book in Minas Tirith. That book was a copy, made at the request of King Elessar, of the Red Book*



of the Periannath and was brought to him by the Thain Peregrin when he retired to Gondor in IV 64.<sup>37</sup>

Scholarly joke though this undoubtedly is, Tolkien carries it through with such seriousness that its overall effect is to go some way to authenticating the fiction. By carrying over the *mythos* of the text into what reads for all the world like a serious critical apparatus, Tolkien is pressing home the illusion that the events of *The Lord of the Rings* really did happen, or if they did not, then he, as our humble translator, was at least not the one who concocted the fiction.<sup>38</sup> This practice of treating his material as pre-existent pervades Tolkien's work. I have already referred to his habit of responding to questions about his characters to which he didn't already know the answer by claiming he would have to "try to find out", rather than invent an answer, almost as though such an enquiry would involve him shuffling off to his converted garage-study and sifting through piles of elvish and Westeron manuscripts, concordances and translations.

The game is taken to a yet further degree by his insistence that Bilbo's *Red Book* was written in Westeron - indeed, Bilbo's translations from the elvish were also into this tongue - it being the Common Tongue of Middle Earth, and that Tolkien's task has been to translate all of this into "the modern tongue of the United Kingdom". To this end, he has also attempted to render the names of his characters into something compatible with the English idiom. Thus Sméagol is his rendering of the Westeron *Trahald* ('burrowing, worming in') and the hobbit we know as Meriadoc 'Merry' Brandybuck was actually called Kalimac Brandagamba. Tolkien explains his principles of translating:

*Meriadoc was chosen to fit the fact that this character's shortened name, Kali, meant in the Westeron 'jolly, gay', though it was actually an abbreviation of the now unmeaning Buckland name Kalimac.<sup>39</sup>*

It will be noted that, for all Tolkien refers here to Merry as a character, in the same breath he insists that is is a 'fact' that his shortened name is 'Kali', and that 'Kali' is Westeron for 'jolly'. He is setting up yet another layer of fictive reality behind those he has created in the text himself. Once again, this information occurs in the appendices in form that is by convention scholarly; one has an expectation that information so presented will be factual. Yet again Tolkien works on our subconscious mind to persuade us that the contents of his works are something much more than the creation of one author. With that proposition goes an implied authority that goes beyond what one would expect from a lone author. This, along with the other techniques discussed in this chapter, and in conjunction with the creative imagery I shall discuss in the next, conspire to persuade the reader that the fictions attain the status of what I have called a quasi-scripture.

#### NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

1. Derrida, Of Grammatology, (trans. Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore '74)
- 1a. This second century document that tells of a series of visions experienced by a slave sold to a Christian lady, commenting closely on the ethical responsibilities of the clergy; in form it is not dissimilar to The Pilgrim's Progress, being in effect the earliest Christian romance.
2. The Muratorian Canon, dating from circa 200 A.D. includes not only the Revelation of John, but also the lurid Revelation of Peter. Of Hermas' The Shepherd it remarks that, though estimable for private reading, it should not be read in Church, since it makes no claim to apostolic authorship. Curiously the Epistle to the Hebrews is missing from this canon, though this and more minor omissions may be explained by the damaged condition of the source document. (See W.H.C. Frend's The Early Church p.73)
3. Josipovici, The Book of God, p.8
4. Helms, R. 'All Tales Need Not Come True', in Studies in the Literary Imagination.
5. See Tolkien's The Letters pp.23-24 & p.42
6. Carpenter, Biog. p.182
7. Tolkien, O.F.S. p.34
8. Madsen, Catherine, Natural Religion in The Lord of the Rings, in Mythlore
9. Giddings, R. Introduction to This Far Land, p.10
10. Berger, John, Ways of Seeing, quoted by Giddings in This Far Land, p.9
11. Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.7
12. Auerbach, E., Odysseus' Scar in Mimesis.
13. *ibid* p.23
14. *ibid*.
15. Tolkien. Sil. pp.287-8
16. *ibid*. Ch.24, pp.296-307



17. Tolkien Sil. p.150
18. Livy, The History of Rome, I.57
19. Frye, Northrop; The Anatomy of Criticism p.34 (Princeton Paperback Ed. 1971)
20. Tolkien, T.T. p.130
21. *idem.* Sil. Ch. 24, pp.296-307
22. *ibid.* [Valaquental], p.28
23. Auerbach, Mimesis p.12
24. Tolkien frequently expressed surprise whenever others expressed interest in the long-term pet project that was to become The Silmarillion
25. Tolkien, The Unfinished Tales, pp.20-31
26. Christopher Tolkien, in his Introduction to The Unfinished Tales, p.5
27. Tolkien, R.K. p.120
28. *ibid* p.291
29. *ibid* p.361
30. Josipovici; The Book of God, p.60
31. *loc.cit.*
32. Shippey, The Road to Middle-Earth p.169
33. Tolkien Sil. p.27
34. *ibid.* p.49
35. Book of Joshua 6:11-1v (A.V.)
36. Tolkien, Farmer Giles of Ham p.9
37. *idem.* F.R. Prologue, p.25
38. Giddings makes the connection between Tolkien's text as chronicle and as scripture when he comments on the source of its extraordinary authority: "because the tone of voice is partly scriptural and partly that of a chronicler, the world view gradually assembled in The Lord of the Rings seems God-willed, long matured by human experience and the lessons of history".
39. Tolkien, Appendix F: R.K. pp.526-7

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE WORKS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

by

DARREN PHILIP ARMSTRONG

CONTENTS

VOLUME TWO

156 . . . . .	Chapter Five:	A Light from the Shadows
210. . . . .	Chapter six:	The Existential Hobbit
277. . . . .	Chapter seven:	The <i>Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth</i> ; Tolkien, the religious thinker.
294. . . . .	Appendix:	The Major Publications of J.R.R. Tolkien
303. . . . .	Bibliography.	

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ' A LIGHT FROM THE SHADOWS'

Some critics have taken the line that Professor Tolkien's works are devoid of Christian imagery, perhaps taking too literally his own avowal that Middle-earth is a *pre-christian* world, and drawing exclusively on the Germanic pagan world view he outlined in his essay, Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics. The discussions of the preceding chapters should be sufficient to give the lie to this ill-advised claim; the present chapter will first examine a sample of Christian - i.e. deriving specifically from the New Testament and its subsequent tradition - imagery which finds a new form, a 'reborn image', in Tolkien's work, particularly in The Lord of the Rings; secondly, staying with the theme of Tolkien's imagery, I shall evaluate the case for Tolkien as a manipulator of Jungian archetypes, with specific attention to the rôle of said archetypes as the emotive units of religious sensibility. I shall pay particular attention to Timothy N. O'Neill's claim, in his book The Individuated Hobbit, that Tolkien's works dramatize the process of individuation whereby the conscious mind comes to terms with its repressed elements, personified as the Shadow, and shifts the seat of personality to the poised equilibrium of the Self. Finally in this chapter, I shall look at another kind of imagery, far less determined than the more obvious images of Christian derivation, but every bit as religious in the



looser, spiritual sense of the word.

The Roman Catholic faith to which Tolkien was devoted finds expression in The Lord of the Rings both thematically and in the form of imagery, though in a generalized manner that avoids any dogmatic statement - a universalising technique that will be of particular significance when I come to discuss the Jungian aspects of his work, and can be seen foreshadowed in his letter on sub-creative technique to Mr. Hastings, quoted in the Introduction. An exhaustive analysis of the christian imagery in The Lord of the Rings alone would require a volume in itself, so I shall content myself with a detailed study of his treatment of a specific category of Christian imagery, that of the Messiah figure in The Lord of the Rings.

### Messianic Imagery in 'The Lord of the Rings'

Tolkien's much quoted dislike of allegory' influences his style to result in a very different kind of Christian literature from, for example, that of his friend and colleague, C.S. Lewis. Tolkien considered Lewis' Narnia books trite and ill-considered; rather heavy handed reworkings of basic religious themes<sup>2</sup>; Aslan, the Son of the King over the Sea, rather obviously represents Christ, and it is difficult to conceive of him having any existence apart from this symbolism. Throughout the Chronicles we see him sacrificed, resurrected, summon creation into being as the agent of his Father, and lead the hosts against the forces of evil in the apocalyptic climax. For Tolkien, however, ready formulated stories are restricting to the creative imagination; there is no genuine sub-creation in simply dressing up old myths. Inevitably such a practice will involve some sort of textual or inter-textual allusion to the primary world, in such a way that the integrity of the secondary world is compromised, damning the sub-creative exercise to failure. On the rare occasions when Tolkien does take an existent myth and

dress it up, as in the Núminor/Atlantis story that forms the climax to the Second Age, it is refashioned in such a way that, far from having any bearing on fifth century Athenian civilization, as Plato's original seems designed to have had, the existence of Núminor is firmly rooted in, indeed directly dependent on, the chain of events from Creation onwards that comprise the narrative of the *Quenta Silmarillion*,<sup>3</sup> and its catastrophe leads directly to the political establishment of Elendil's realms in exile in Middle Earth that set the scene for the events of the Third Age and of *The Lord of the Rings*. In other words, the complete integration of the Atlantis legend into the total mythos of Middle-earth strip it of its primary world associations and reforge its mythic components anew. Similarly, rather than allegorise his christian beliefs, Tolkien rather dissolves his faith and allows the resulting solution to re-crystallise in new patterns. The substance remains the same, but the form is regenerated. The personalities and events of biblical and church tradition are no more than ingredients, among others, in what he calls the Soup of Tales.<sup>4</sup> He explains his view of the nature of his allusive fiction in commenting on Gandalf's death and resurrection:

*Though one may be reminded of the Gospels, it is not really the same thing at all. The Incarnation of God is an infinitely greater thing than anything I would dare to write. Here I am only concerned with Death as part of the nature, both physical and spiritual, of Man, and with Hope without any guarantees.<sup>5</sup>*

Middle-earth, unlike Narnia, lacks a Messiah, one divinely anointed, whose advent is long looked forward to by the populace to relieve them of their suffering. There is, however, a large body of imagery attached to several of the principal characters which refers directly to Christian and/or Judaic messianic tradition, which has the effect of setting up sympathetic spiritual reverberations through association, without actually summoning allusions to the primary

scriptures to the conscious mind of the reader.

But it is first necessary for me to indicate specifically the broad range of allusions that I mean to be understood by the term 'messiah'. On one hand we have the Christian concept of the Son, one person of the Holy Trinity, embracing various subsidiary concepts such as Christ Militant, the Harrower of Hell, the Lamb of God &c, which finds its sources in the Gospels and subsequent Church traditions. On the other hand we have the original Jewish conception of the messiah, drawn primarily from the Scriptures, and just as familiar to Tolkien from his close reading of the Old Testament. It would be more precise to say Jewish *conceptions* of the messiah, for accounts and allusions differ markedly within a broad framework. Robert Graves identifies five different messianic figures,<sup>45</sup> each of which were the object of eschatological expectation of different sects within Palestine between the 1st Century B.C. and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D.70. The Warrior Messiah was one of the most widespread beliefs, and this type took two forms; the first was the Son of David, who, in the minds of the common people and indeed the authors of Luke and Matthew, would be a direct descendant of the great King David, who would restore the Southern Kingdom of Judah, reigning in glory from the Citadel of Jerusalem. The variation on the warrior messiah theme was the Son of Joseph, also called the Son of Ephraim, who was something of a rival claimant to the Son of David, implying that the royal sceptre would pass from the House of David to the Northern Tribes of the Kingdom of Israel, a geo-political situation with a remarkable parallel in Tolkien's twin realms of Gondor and Arnor. The third messianic type was the Son of Man, a supernatural figure who would appear in the midst of the apocalyptic battle riding on a cloud. The source for this figure is the vision of Daniel;

*"I beheld then because of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed and*



*given to the burning flame...I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him."* >

The legitimacy of this figure as a genuine messianic type has been questioned by many commentators,<sup>8</sup> but its close identification with the apocalypse makes its exact status academic as far as my current purpose is concerned. The fourth type was the priest-king, or Son of Levi, a sacerdotal figure who would sanctify the conquests of his generals and chastise those who had turned away from priestly authority before embarking on a beneficent reign of peace. Lastly, and of immense importance to the Christian, in justifying the ignominy of the Cross, is the type of the Suffering Servant, or *Ebed-Yahweh*, who takes upon himself immense suffering for the sake of others. The principal source for this figure is the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>9</sup> With these figures in mind, as well as the more familiar concept of the Christian messiah and its attendant myths, I propose to examine the imagery that surrounds three of Tolkien's major characters; Aragorn, Gandalf and Frodo.

Aragorn is the only character in *The Lord of the Rings* who could possibly be viewed as an actual messianic figure; he is the King who shall come again, vanquishing evil and instituting a glorious reign of peace. Like the Messiah, his coming has been prophesied centuries earlier by Malbeth, the Seer of the court of his last reigning forebear, Arvedui of Arnor.<sup>10</sup> His descent from revered ancient kings makes him 'The Heir of Isildur', a title that is used almost as the Jews used 'Son of David'. He is occasionally distinguished by the even more exalted title of the 'Heir of Elendil'. Elendil, of course, was the father of both Isildur, founder of the Northern Kingdom, and Anárion, founder of the Southern Kingdom, and this title is of much greater political consequence than 'Heir of Isildur'. There has not been a throne in the North for Isildur's heirs to occupy for a thousand years, since Fornost was captured by the Witch-King of

Angmar in 1974 T.A., but the Heir of Elendil is also the heir to the throne of Gondor, where the House of Mardil the Steward has been ruling ever since the last Southern Heir rode out of Minas Tirith to meet the challenge of the Morgul King and was lost. Denethor II, the current Ruling Steward, has no desire to see a restoration;

"But I say to thee, Gandalf Mithrandir, I will not be your tool! I am Steward of the House of Anárion. I will not step down to be the dotard chamberlain of an upstart. Even were his claim proved to me, still he comes but of the line of Isildur. I will not bow to such a one, last of a ragged house long bereft of lordship and dignity." ''

These sentiments irresistibly recall the paranoia of Herod the Great on receiving news of the birth of the King of the Jews. Furthermore, this awkward dynastic *impasse* is prefigured in the conflicting sectarian messianic projections of 1st century Palestine, the debate between proponents of the Son of David and the Son of Joseph. Graves expands on the concept of the Son of Joseph;

*"But what did 'Joseph' signify? Did it not perhaps signify the whole holy nation of Israel which had been led out of Egypt by Moses, rather than the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh with whom the name later became identified, and all but the poor remnants of whom had been carried away into Assyrian captivity seven hundred years previously, never to return? In that case, the Son of David might also be the Son of Joseph, and the meaning of the blessing of Judah might be that Judah [Anárion] should keep the tribal sovereignty until the time came to extent it to all Israel [all Elendil's realms]"*

The title 'Heir of Elendil' is therefore equivalent to Son of Joseph, in its broadest sense. From the mists of time a royal heir

unlooked for shall appear to reunite the twin Kingdoms,'<sup>11</sup>  
inaugurating a Golden Age of peace and prosperity;

"From the ashes a fire shall be woken,  
A light from the shadows shall spring."<sup>13</sup>

Few in Middle Earth know Aragorn's identity, as his enemies would lose no time in eliminating him. The very existence of an heir is a matter of speculation. Tolkien is as careful as Aragorn himself to reveal his true nature gradually and largely by hints, and as Paul Kocher has pointed out, the reader's long ignorance of his history is largely responsible for the difficulties his character presents.<sup>14</sup> But we also pick up an echo of the Jesus of the Gospels, who performs the first half of his ministry in secret, with the constant injunction to those he heals or who witness his miracles to "say nothing of what you have seen."<sup>15</sup> Jesus is only too aware that a messianic claim at that stage would only bring down the wrath of the hostile imperial force of Rome and the uneasy jealousy of the Herodians upon him, just as Aragorn must beware not only of Sauron's servants but also of Denethor's malice. Again like Jesus, Aragorn chooses his moment to reveal himself to his enemy with great deliberation, when he assumes his rightful ownership of the palantír and wrests it from Sauron's grasp by force of will. This occasion is reminiscent not only of Christ's battle of wills with Satan in the Wilderness, but also of his baptism which immediately precedes it in the synoptic gospels, these events marking both Jesus and Aragorn's attainment of full manhood and the commencement of their respective missions. Aragorn has hitherto taken a back seat to Gandalf, Théoden and Éomer in the healing of the King, the battle of Helm's Deep and the parley with Saruman, but in revealing his existence to Sauron he assumes command and responsibility for the strategic policy of the entire West. It is poetically appropriate that the company of the Dúnadaín deliver his royal standard to him that very night.



Other parallels with Jesus abound; Aragorn as the rightful king 'has the hands of a healer' and is able to restore Faramir, Éowyn and Meriadoc. Tolkien is here drawing on the ancient chivalric notion of the Royal Touch, itself probably deriving from the medieval identification of the temporal king as an earthly equivalent to Christ the King of Heaven, accountable to no lesser power. except perhaps Christ's Vicar. Again like Christ, Aragorn's journey along the Paths of the Dead and his ultimate freeing of the Dead Men of Dunharrow from the bond of their oath, enacts the medieval tradition of the Harrowing of Hell.

Indeed at times Tolkien's very language seems to cry out for comparison with messianic prophecy. When Aragorn is crowned by Gandalf, we read:

*But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir cried:*

*'Behold the King!'*<sup>6</sup>

Note how closely this language invokes Old Testament passages such as Malachi 4:11 - "But unto you that fear my name shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in his wings". And it is surely inconceivable that Tolkien could have used an expression such as 'ancient of days' without a conscious nod in the direction of God the Father, though this sort of obviousness, the use of phrases that leap off the page at the reader, is atypical of Tolkien's technique. His preference was to work at a more evocative level; a notable example of such subliminal scene-setting is Gwaihir's Song, the tidings brought out of the East that Aragorn the king had been victorious against all odds over the enemy;



*"Sing and be glad, all you children of the West,  
for your King shall come again,  
and he shall dwell among you  
all the days of your life."*

The song, as has been remarked upon by others,<sup>17</sup> is similar in form and content to Psalm 47,

*"Oh clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.*

*For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great king over all the earth."*<sup>18</sup>

But it is worth remarking that the whole manner of its introduction is out of step with Tolkien's usual narrative style. The tone of the narrative may move from the homely to the grandiose, but with the eagle's flight from the East the language becomes remote and unadorned, inviting a comparison with the the language of the Old Testament:

*"And before the Sun had fallen far from noon, out of the East there came a great Eagle flying, and he bore tidings beyond hope from the Lords of the West, crying...&c"*

Notice that the words 'sun', 'east', 'eagle' are exalted with capital letters. Close attention to what is actually happening reveals that this passage constitutes a break with the 'realist' technique Tolkien has used throughout most of the text, (the demands of fantasy literature notwithstanding): a great eagle flies over the city of Minas Tirith and sings a psalm of victory. Everyone in the city seems to hear him and to catch all of the words and their implications, and immediately begin dancing in the streets. "And people sang in all the ways of the City," is all Tolkien says of the Eagle's reception. The

style involves simple assertion, devoid of adjectival description or analysis, conforming to the characteristics of Auerbach's 'homeric' language typical of scripture. The deliberately formalised structure introduces the aspect of awe to the intellectual reception of the narrative; the ritual of deliverance is enacted, as it is historically in the Psalms, and again in Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* in Luke's Gospel.

The messianic imagery pertaining to Gandalf is more problematic than that of Aragorn. The latter, in his rôle of King who shall come again, can be seen as one kind of actual messianic figure, but it would be a perversion of Tolkien's meaning to mistake Gandalf for a messiah. He, like the other Istari, is a *maia*, an angelic being of a secondary order, as indeed are Sauron, the Balrog and perhaps Bombadil. They come out of the West as "*messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him; but they were forbidden to match his power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force and fear.*"<sup>19</sup> This injunction against power is out of step with every form of messianic claim, even that of the Suffering Servant who at least has the expectation of reigning after his eucatastrophe. The other Istari fail, either by being distracted (Radagast, and perhaps Alatar and Pallando) or by direct apostasy (Saruman). But Gandalf, ever true to his purpose, achieves distinctly Christ-like attributes. All the Istari undergo a full incarnation.<sup>20</sup> It is true that "*they were never young and aged only slowly*", but the doctrinal point behind their incarnation seems to be identical with that laid down by the Church for the incarnation of Christ, that they should fully share in our mortal nature: "*clad in the bodies of men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears, pains and weariness of earth.*"<sup>21</sup> Thus Gandalf does indeed endure a physical death after his battle with the Balrog, his lifeless body lying on the peak of Zirak-Zigil for a significant three days until he is bodily resurrected: "*I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words with a serving-man till the lightning falls,*" he tells Gríma. And yet, like the resurrected Jesus,

a change has come over Gandalf. When Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas encounter him for the first time since Moria, he tells them that *"none of you have any weapons that could hurt me"*<sup>22</sup>, and yet moments later lays his hand on Gimli's head. Gandalf would seem to bear some kind of subtle body, solid but now invulnerable, much as the risen Christ is able to be touched and yet is capable of disappearing into thin air. Gandalf's body is now *fanár*, as *The Silmarillion* explains; suffused with the celestial light of Valinor, ( he is *"light as a swan's feather...with the sun shining through you,"* Gwaihir tells him as he carries his naked resurrected body to Lórien to be healed and reclothed.) His revival after Moria amounts to a major policy revision on the part of the Valar; he is allowed to have *"forgotten much that I thought I knew, and learned again much that I had forgotten."* The moment of his first unveiling his new glistening white robes to his three companions irresistibly recalls the transfiguration of Christ, and their initial failure to recognise him invokes the disciples' failure to recognise the risen Jesus. He is never again quite the homely, indulgent old wizard of *The Hobbit* and the first volume of the trilogy. His mission is approaching its climax and he has become a semi-supernatural figure, very like the Son of Man. The language of his timely return to Helm's Deep is deliberately apocalyptic;

"There suddenly upon a ridge appeared a rider, clad in white, shining in the rising sun. Over the low hills the horns were sounding...'Behold the White Rider!' cried Aragorn. 'Gandalf is come again!'...Down leaped Shadowfax, like a deer that runs surefooted in the mountains. The White Rider was upon them, and the terror of his coming filled his enemies with madness."<sup>23</sup>

The image of the Son of Man riding on the clouds is recalled by Gandalf's three flights with Gwaihir the Eagle. Apart from the unconscious Frodo and Sam, and the anonymous Nazgûl, he is the only character who is ever born through the air, and it is surely



significant that his horse, Shadowfax, who *'might have been foaled in the morning of the world'*, untamable by any but he, is constantly associated with the wind and the night sky.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, in the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar associates the Son of God with fire, recognizing him as the fourth man in the fiery furnace<sup>25</sup>; Gandalf, as the bearer of Narya, the elven Ring of Fire, whose reputation in the Shire rests on his wonderful firework displays, has a similar elemental association. Like Melkor, Sauron and the Balrogs, Gandalf in his angelic state, as Olorin the Maia, is a fire spirit. Unlike them, however, he represents fire in its positive aspect; *"for he was the Enemy of Sauron, opposing the fire that destroys and wastes with the fire that kindles, and succours in wanhope and distress"*.<sup>26</sup> He is closely associated with Varda,<sup>27</sup> Queen of the Stars; fire as the giver of light, the comforter, the reflection of the Divine Presence. He is the agent of the Light of the World, who *"became a radiant flame (yet veiled still save in great need)"*.<sup>28</sup>

Tolkien's treatment of Frodo is very different. It may be argued that far from being messianic, Frodo represents the Christian soul on its painful journey towards the salvation which the messiah makes possible, and as such belongs more to the Miltonic and Bunyanist literary tradition than that of the Scriptures. But it is in Frodo that the Christian imagery becomes most obvious. When the company rest at Parth Galen, Frodo sits on the Seat of Seeing, on the high hill of Amon Hen and, wearing the ring, is vouchsafed a vision of the many lands and peoples of Middle-earth:

*He seemed to be in a world of mist in which there were only shadows: the Ring was upon him. Then here and there the mist gave way and he saw many visions: small and clear as if they were bright living images....Eastwards he looked into wide uncharted lands, nameless plains, and forests unexplored. Northwards he looked, and the Great River lay like a ribbon beneath him, and the*



*Misty Mountains stood small and hard as broken teeth. Westwards he looked, and saw the broad pastures of Rohan; and Orthanc, the pinnacle of Isengard, like a black spike. Southwards he looked, and below his very feet the Great River curled like a toppling wave, and plunged over the falls of Rauros into a foaming pit...and Ethir Anduin he saw, the mighty deltas of the River, and myriads of sea-birds whirling like a white dust in the sun, and beneath them a green and silver sea, rippling in endless lines.<sup>29</sup>*

Tolkien goes on to describe how Frodo witnessed this panorama seething with discord and preparations for war, and then Sauron's presence is felt, the sleepless Eye, aware of him and searching to pin him down. In showing Frodo the wide world of which he has hitherto been barely aware, and introducing the demonic presence of Sauron at this point, Tolkien subtly invokes the second temptation of Christ:

*And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them.<sup>30</sup>*

The temptation is dramatized as Frodo struggles between the urge to cry out to the Eye 'I am here' and the instinct that commands him to take off the Ring. As his mission continues, the New Testament imagery multiplies. The nightmarish journey into Mordor, towards a mountain on which he is certain he must meet his death, whether his quest succeeds or fails, becomes the Via Dolorosa. The Ring, which grows heavier and more painful the nearer he draws to his destination, becomes, at one level, a symbol of the cross.<sup>31</sup> Samwise doubles as Simon the Cyrenian, taking on his master's intolerable burden for a while, during Frodo's imprisonment in Cirith Ungol, and even more pointedly, carrying both Frodo and the Ring when his master's strength fails completely in the final stages of their

journey. It would not, perhaps, be pushing credibility too far to suggest that Tolkien fully intended a quibble to be made on the name of the plateau in Mordor that is Frodo's destination, Gorgoroth, and Golgotha, the scene of Christ's passion. Frodo is presented as the Suffering Servant, who has voluntarily accepted his burden, ("*I will take the ring,*" he said, *'though I do not know the way'*<sup>32</sup>), and fulfils the prophecy of Boromir's dream ("*The Halfling forth shall stand*"). As *Ebed-Yahweh* he is as much an instrument of the providence that Gandalf hints at as is Gollum. His mutilations do not precisely correspond with Christ's, but his main wounds are in the hand, where Gollum bites off his finger, and in the side, where he is stung by Shelob, which are close enough to make the point. Furthermore he is thought to be dead at least four times, and each time rises again, the most vivid occasion being after Shelob's attack when for a sustained period the reader himself actually believes him to be dead. His final years in the Shire, pained constantly by his wounds, both physical and mental, correspond to Jesus' time after the resurrection with his disciples, and it is only in the Undyinglands to the West that he can hope to find healing. Frodo is no messiah, but the close identification between the hobbit of the fiction who is Everyman, and Jesus, Tolkien's own messiah, provides a vivid insight into the human sufferings of Christ, an interior monologue of the Suffering Servant in understandably earthly terms.

That there is no cosmological Messiah after the style of Aslan in Middle-earth is in itself indicative of Tolkien's approach to both his faith and his sub-creation, both of which are inextricably bound up together. While cherishing an orthodox Roman Catholic belief, his fiction was a reflection of the paradox his faith plunged him into. As Carpenter suggests, the Roman faith was at once something precious his mother had given to him, and also that which was responsible in his eyes for her early death, estranged from her protestant family;

*"But from now onwards there was a second side, more private but predominant in his diaries and letters. This side of him was capable of bouts of profound despair. More precisely, and more closely related to his mother's death, when he was in this mood he had a deep sense of impending loss. Nothing was safe. Nothing would last. No battle would be won forever." 33*

A messiah promises an endless reign of peace and glory, something Tolkien was unable to believe in. Even the destruction of Sauron's power with the Ring is not the end of evil and suffering. Melkor has woven his discord into the very fabric of creation and it cannot be expunged till the world is unmade; as Gandalf tells Frodo, *"ever after a respite, the Shadow takes on a new form and grows again."* 34 Every bloody battle in Beleriand is destined to be followed by a worse; every Age of the world is superseded by another. The melancholy millenarianism of the Elves, knowing that their time is passing with the Third Age, implies just as surely that the golden reign of Aragorn Elessar, which ushers in the Age of Men, will pass away in its turn. A messiah is the figure who stands at the Time of the End, but in a sub-created world there can be no end; like Bilbo's Road, the Tale goes ever on and on. There can be no Son of God in Tolkien's world because all Elves and Men are the Children of Ilúvatar.

Messianic imagery by no means exhausts the Judeo-Christian imagery of The Lord of the Rings, but comprises only one category. A full analysis would require an entire volume to itself, but consideration might be given to an interesting pattern of correspondences which are set up when the novel is considered in the conjunction with The Silmarillion and beyond that, the Old and New Testaments. Galadriel, for example, is depicted in terms of sanctity and grace that recall Varda, Queen of the Valar, in The Silmarillion, and beyond that, the Virgin Mary of Christian tradition. Varda, as Elbereth, the Kindler of the Stars, is directly related to Mary as



Queen of Heaven and Stella Mater, and to Galadriel through the Star Glass which she gave to Frodo containing the reflected light of Eärendil's star. Similarly the woodland realm of Lothlórien (= "Blossom of Lórien") not only recalls but is named for Lórien, the Garden of Dreams of the Vala Irmo in The Silmarillion, the earthly paradise, which in its turn invokes the Garden of Eden. Time and again we encounter images in The Lord of the Rings which seem to hark back to a precursor in an earlier age of Arda - usually something located in the Undyinglands - which in itself refers to a symbol outside the mythos, from Judeo-Christian mythology, and in each instantiation a diminishment seems to have occurred. Hence, working backwards, the Trees of Knowledge and of Life, in the garden of Eden, are evoked by the two trees of Yavanna, Laurelin and Telperion, which are themselves recalled by the White Tree in the Elven city of Tirion: finally, before Aragorn's coronation, Gandalf takes him onto the mountain above Minas Tirith and reveals to him the last surviving sapling of the White Tree, which is transplanted in the citadel. Through this system of images, resonating not only back into the fictional history of the mythos but also beyond it into the primary world, we discover an example of Tolkien's assertion that the most successful forms of sub-creation involve aspects of the Primary and Secondary worlds flowing into each other, bringing a glimpse of evangelium.<sup>35</sup>

Of course the extent to which Tolkien intended the correspondences and references outlined above is debatable. Some (such as 'the ancient of days' reference and Gandalf's resurrection after three days) were almost certainly intentional; other potent images may have found their way into the text without Tolkien's conscious knowledge, they being, as I hope to have shown, possessed of an insistent subliminal power, being so deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness. Tolkien freely admitted to incorporating details into his tales that invoked a spiritual significance outside the Secondary world:



*The Fellowship...left on December 25th, which then had no significance, since the Yule, or its equivalent, was then the last day of the year and the first of the new year. But Dec. 25th (setting out) and March 25th (accomplishment of the text) were intentionally chosen by me.<sup>36</sup>*

March 25th being, of course, the Feast of the Annunciation, thus signifying to 'those who have eyes to see' the completion of the quest as preparing the ground for the coming of the King, the reign of Aragorn Elessar and the Age of Men; the deliberate choice on Tolkien's part indicated his consciousness of creating a symbolic infrastructure, which, though wider than bald allegory, is nevertheless allusive.

### Creative Imagery

This leads us to the question of originality. Tolkien's works have been accused of being too derivative, drawing heavily on Norse and Finnish mythic cycles. I hope that I have by now succeeded in demonstrating that such a view is too narrow, not taking account of the implicit Christian elements which constitute a major part of Tolkienesque fantasy. But we are still left with the question of originality. Is Tolkien simply borrowing images from the Old and New Testaments? Is so, then his major works amount to little more than what Giddings has described as "at its lowest level...cheap (if slick) legerdemain"<sup>37</sup>, a literary pursuit that is intrinsically parasitic. It was precisely this sort of casual borrowing and transposing of images that seems to have been one of Tolkien's main objections to Lewis's Narnia series, and is almost certainly what he was attacking in his frequently stated dislike of allegory. The Oxford theologian, Austin Farrer, who as Chaplain and Fellow of Trinity College was a contemporary and acquaintance of Tolkien's,<sup>38</sup> has described the

psychological process by which deeply ingrained, emotive images which arise in scripture undergo a periodic change which revitalises them for a contemporary audience, a process which he compares to a rebirth. Discussing the New Testament in general, as a preliminary to a detailed study of the Revelations of St John, he illustrates how Old Testament images, pregnant with spiritual associations to a reader in Palestine of the First Century A.D., are reformed and synthesized in the mythologised image of Jesus Christ.

*Since, then, we must regard the Christian revolution as essentially a transformation of images, it is not reasonable to leave Christ himself out of the transforming work. There had arisen in Judaism the image of heroic and unmerited suffering for God's glory and the good of the brethren, especially in the figure of Joseph: and this image was tending to fuse with that of the blood-offering in atonement of sin. There was also the image of the Messiah, in whose enthronement the Kingdom of God would be manifested on earth. There were also images of the divine power and presence - God is in heaven, but his 'Name' is in the Temple, his Wisdom or Word or Spirit is in the mind of the prophet, or, in some degree, wherever there is a mind alive with the divine law. There was an image of divine sonship, belonging primarily to the chosen people. In Christ's very existence all these images fused. Joseph the saint of sacrificial loving kindness, the ritual Lamb of the atonement, David the viceroy of God, the word of God's presence and power, Israel the son of God, Adam the new-created image of God: all these were reborn in one divine Saviour out of the sepulchre of Christ.<sup>39</sup>*

Christ thus achieved a rebirth of Old Testament images in his very person, according to Farrer, though he also concedes the secular view that "the transformation [of the images] took place first in the minds of the disciples and was projected back upon [Jesus]". Either

way a set of highly charged spiritual images are invoked in the New Testament in a new manifestation. The authors of the Gospels and Epistles were no parasites, drawing on the imagery of the scriptures to achieve a cheap literary effect; their vision, in relation to the person of Christ, had altered their perception of those ancient images, which were reborn anew with their meaning, for them as well as for their readers. In Tolkien's terms, the old images, which had become trite through the familiarity of synagogue recitals since childhood, were subjected to a recovery of freshness of meaning through their association with the experience of Jesus Christ. It is only the depth of revelation brought about through this recovery of vision that debars us from describing it in terms of Chestertonian *Mooreeffoc*, which is presumably what Tolkien had in mind in stating that his concept of recovery ranged far beyond that of Chesterton.

Tolkien's work achieves a similar revitalising of spiritual/cultural images, and like the Evangelists, his source of images is impeccably authoritative. As Farrer comments of the New Testament:

*Since the process is of the rebirth of images, it is to the matrix of images, the Old Testament, that the Spirit continually leads: for here are the images awaiting rebirth.<sup>40</sup>*

Tolkien's matrix is the Old and New Testaments, and his text affords those images yet another incarnation. Of course *The Lord of the Rings* is not an explicitly religious work, it is specifically a fiction, and therefore its authority, objectively speaking, is diminished.<sup>41</sup> However its non-religious status does nothing to impair the illusion of authority which it appropriates by association as described above. The effective rebirth, as opposed to the mere pilfering, of images is achieved through Tolkien's 'inner consistency of reality', and is facilitated through the fantasy form. As one prominent critic has expressed it:

It is in the process of fantasy that the contemplative characters of things are broken from their historical setting and made available to express the needs and impulses of the experiencing mind.<sup>42</sup>

The *'needs and impulses of the experiencing mind'* have differed throughout the twentieth century from those of the first century A.D., and it is to these contemporary needs and impulses that Tolkien's reworked images have appealed. The secularisation of society which began with the Humanist movement and gathered momentum in the late seventeenth century's Enlightenment have eventually yielded a contemporary collective consciousness which has a profound need for spiritual values and yet is embarrassed at the very approach of anything savouring of 'religion'. Tolkien's works, which are not only culturally acceptable but positively fashionable, provide such an readership with the age-old spiritual images with all their authoritative impact wrapped up inside them, in a neatly secularised form. I want now to look in closer detail at one theory that may shed light on the nature of that psychological impact.

### Tolkien and C.G.Jung's Archetypal Theory

I quoted Farrer above, describing the Old Testament as a 'matrix' for the imagery of the New Testament, and suggested, on his analogy, that both Testaments constituted a similar matrix for Tolkien's imagery. But perhaps the term would be better reserved for the deeper psychological stratum that C.G. Jung argued determines the form of all such images, and as such would underlie both the Gospels and Tolkien's sub-creating; the religious life and the secular. The subconscious mind determines our reactions to items as prosaic as



family life, or different types of food, but at its most far reaching it also shapes our reaction to, indeed our formulations of, the sacred: the numinous object. As such, it may be said to govern the quality and form of our religious experiences, and cannot therefore fail to be of interest to the current enquiry.

Jung's psychological models have by no means won universal assent within the medical world that formed his own background, and despite building a steady following in Europe, have been slow to influence clinical psychiatry in the United States. They have, however, been of enormous influence in the field of the arts, especially of literary criticism, and time may prove that it is in this area that Jung's greatest contribution has been made. The theory of archetypes, and its corollary, the theory of the collective unconscious, offer a systematic outline of the working of the human imagination in what is probably the most significant single contribution to the field since Kant, and are of particular importance to this study in that they provide an explanation on psychological grounds to the nature of the images previously discussed, their profound relevance to the psyche, and to how they may come to be 'reborn'. The theory also contains clues to the nature of the blurring of the religious and the secular that we have noticed throughout this study of Tolkien's fiction. Tolkien was familiar with Jung's works; his theories were occasionally discussed at meetings of the Inklings, C.S. Lewis being a particularly enthusiastic Jungian.

Jung's theories are far too complex for me to attempt any sort of summary that could possibly do justice to them in the limited space available, though I should like to note that any detailed study of his writings is rewarded by innumerable new insights into Tolkien's works. I shall however have something to say about the nature of the Archetype in general and a few of the most important specific Archetypes described by Jung. For a proper understanding of these theories, and the wider context of the individuation process, I refer the reader to Jung's The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,

and Modern Man in Search of a Soul, or to a good general introduction such as Freda Fordham's An Introduction to Jung's Psychology. In the course of the ensuing discussion, however, I shall try to explain important aspects of theory as concisely as I am able.

The first point to be stressed is that, in the sense that Jung intends, the Archetype is *not* an idea, either conscious or unconscious. It is a formal configuration located in the unconscious (whether that unconscious be personal or collective, need not for the moment concern us). In Jung's words:

*Again and again I encounter the mistaken notion that an archetype is determined in regard to its contents, in other words that it is a kind of unconscious idea (if such an expression be admissible). It is necessary to point out...that archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form, and then only to a very limited degree.<sup>43</sup>*

Elsewhere Jung compares the Archetype to the matrical structure of a crystal, something that has no actuality in itself, but possesses an implied existence, since a given substance will always form crystals that conform to pre-determined strictures to a precise mathematical degree. Secondly the distinction must be stressed between the Archetype as just described (and which I shall indicate throughout with an upper case capital), and the *archetypal image*, which is an idea in the conscious mind partially determined by the former. The Archetype is unknowable, except through inference from the archetypal idea, which following our analogy, would correspond to the chemical substance of the crystal. Our awareness of the unconscious Archetypes is made possible by observing the common occurrence of related images that persistently recur in myths, fairy-tales, dreams, and indeed, literature and scripture.

The archetypal image, however, which corresponds to the Archetypal form, resides in the conscious mind, and derives its content from the

experience of the individual. The existence of the unconscious Archetype, if not the very concept of an unconscious itself, may seem to refute the Lockean concept of the infant mind as a *tabula rasa*, though we come close to returning to this idea when we consider that experience is necessary to actualize the Archetypal forms inherent in the individual.

From this, one highly significant point may be derived: while the Archetypal pattern in the unconscious mind is identical in every individual (whether the same Archetype is shared by all collectively, or separate but identical Archetypes exist in the individual unconscious), the archetypal image derived from it is uniquely personal, taking its substance from the emotional, intellectual and experiential life of the subject. The pattern finds an analogue in the commonly experienced reluctance of many people to accept an actor in the role of a favourite literary character simply because he is not as they imagined the character. We may suppose the casting director and the actor himself have both read the same literary text as the reader, but very different interpretations are possible within the parameters of the author's description of the character, no matter how detailed it might be. This is because any reader inevitably personalizes the character through a chain of largely unconscious memories and experiential resonances, and the individual's interpretation may be peculiarly vivid when the character concerned is presented in strong archetypal terms. Tolkien's Gandalf, for example, is a striking example of an actualization of the Archetype Jung calls the Old Wise Man.<sup>44</sup> He exhibits almost all of the characteristics described as part of the pattern: wisdom, esoteric knowledge, magical ability. Even his appearance corresponds to the average visualisation of the Archetype; "he had a long white beard and bushy eyebrows that stuck out beyond the brim of his hat". His inscrutability and occasional tentatively oracular pronouncements,



e.g. *"And [Gollum] is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells methat he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many - yours not least",<sup>45</sup>*

reinforce the suggestion of otherworldly knowledge. Yet it is part of the reader's role to piece out the imperfections of any author with his thoughts, and the individual reader's response to Gandalf is invariably coloured by his own experience. To some, specific details of Tolkien's narrative will recall subconscious memories of a kindly grandfather, others will subliminally recall, from Gandalf's occasional rebukes to the wayward Peregrin Took, impressions of a stern father, or perhaps a schoolmaster. Still others will closely associate the resurrected Gandalf with the risen Christ, or perhaps with God the Father, and perhaps given additional impetus by intense personal religious experiences. Some might imbue Gandalf with a sense of an Old Testament prophet, associating his cold reception on his first visit to Théoden's court and Wormtongue's bestowing upon him the name *Láthspell*, 'Stormcrow', with the public reception of the prophet Jeremiah, whos coming also presaged disaster. Of course it is possible for virtually anyone, independent of experience, to intellectually contemplate Gandalf in all these aspects and more, but the subconscious response which determines the overall view of the character is determined by the conjunction of the Archetypal form of the Old Wise Man with a content derived from personal experience, thus effecting a strong identification of the personal with the universal: the subjective synthesized with the objective.

Tolkien's Gandalf is, of course, very much on the side of the angels - literally speaking. But all Archetypes may have a light and a dark side, and that of the Old Wise Man is no exception. Tolkien is able to personify this also, in the secondary character of Denethor, possessed of dangerously distorted esoteric knowledge through the *palantír*, who acts as the darker counterbalance to the



secondary Old Wise Man, Théoden. The link between Denethor and Théoden is underscored not only by the parallel rôles they play in relation to Pippin and Merry's respective moral development, but rather pointedly by the fact that their names are, but for one letter, an anagram. Both are initially suffering from a malaise induced, directly or indirectly, by the Enemy. Théoden, through his innate generosity of heart and relative simplicity of soul, is responsive to Gandalf's words of hope, and tearing himself free from his despair, leads his warband valiantly into battle on the side of the forces of Light. Denethor, however, is inextricably lost in the ultimate sin of despair. He is more cultured than Théoden, his relationship to the latter being close to that of a Byzantine regent to a loyal barbarian client king. But it is his unshakable sense of his own intelligence, in other words, his pride, that prevents his heeding Gandalf's words that might have saved him from himself. Both men are fathers, grieving for the deaths of their eldest sons; in both cases this grief leads to the initial rejection of the love of their second sons, (in Théoden's case, his 'sister-son', or nephew, Éomer, who on Théodred's death has become Théoden's heir). Éomer has angered Théoden by taking a warband and pursuing and destroying an orc horde crossing Rohan territory against the king's explicit instructions. Théoden however, is quickly brought to realise that, first, Éomer's disobedience was a result of his love for Théoden in wishing to avenge Théodred's death, and secondly, that he was also discharging the chivalric responsibility of the royal to the entire people of Rohan, to protect their lands from hostile incursions, that was most properly the duty of Théoden, their king. Théoden possesses wisdom enough to perceive his own errors and admit them. Denethor, however, who has always resented the influence of Gandalf over his second son, Faramir, a 'wizard's pupil', openly allows his grief to master him upon hearing of Boromir's death, to the extent that he makes it clear he had rather Faramir had died in his place. This sends Faramir out to battle with the intention of meeting his death and is brought back to

the city seriously wounded. Only now can knowledge of his love for his second son break through Denethor's black grief, but thinking Faramir beyond recovery, and the fault being his own, Denethor's despair deepens and he tries to burn the unconscious Faramir on a pyre, thereby coming close to causing his second son's death twice over. As battle rages around the city of Minas Tirith, both Théoden and Denethor die; Théoden meets a glorious death in the thick of the fray, as befits a great old Germanic king, to the reflected honour of his House and heir; Denethor on the other hand perishes shamefully inside the citadel, burning himself on the pyre intended for his still living heir. Both Old Men are wise, but while the wisdom of Théoden is the wisdom of the spirit, Denethor's is the darker Shadow-wisdom of the intellect; that which reasons coldly, yet appreciates no values.

The same archetypal ambivalence is to be detected in most religious/mythic systems. The Scandinavian Odin has been compared with both Gandalf and Saruman, and conforms most satisfactorily to the Jungian type of the Old Wise Man; as Wotan, in Teutonic myth, he wanders Midgarð disguised as an aged, bearded pilgrim, clad in grey and leaning on a spear/staff.<sup>46</sup> He has only one eye, having voluntarily sacrificed the other in return for being permitted to hang from the World Tree and learn the wisdom of the sacred Runes; but for all his wisdom his character is, to borrow an adjective from his Mediterranean counterpart, mercurial. As a deity of war, he was to replace the more archaic Tiw, (Saxon Tíwaz), whose name was synonymous with justice, whereas Odin was notoriously fickle, having scant concern for issues of right and wrong among men. The ambivalence of the archetype is however most clearly mapped out by Tolkien in the relationship between Gandalf and the character who we can view as his *alter ego*, or in Jungian terms, his Shadow: Saruman. Saruman, whose knowledge is at least equal to Gandalf's, is similarly a *maia*, incarnated with the same brief, to oppose the growing powers of evil. But Saruman's darker nature undermines his wisdom; he fails

in his purpose, while Gandalf does not. The conflict between the two wizards, who are several times stated to look remarkably alike, and may be viewed as the positive and negative aspect of the same personality, is specifically played out in two key scenes which effectively constitute mirror-images of each other. In the first, Saruman imprisons Gandalf on the pinnacle of his tower of Orthanc, giving the first clear revelation of Saruman's apostasy. He shows his true colours - literally;

*His robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours, and if he moved, they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered.* <sup>47</sup>

Saruman makes his real attitude clear, claiming that white "serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page may be over-written; and the white light can be broken." <sup>48</sup> That which brakes the white light is, in psychological terms, the shadow; Saruman is Gandalf's Shadow, the personification of all the repressed and rejected aspects of Gandalf's personality. What is more, Saruman seems to understand the curious psychological depths that bind him to Gandalf. He dismisses Radagast, a third wizard, as a fool and a simpleton, who could be manipulated into luring Gandalf to Isengard, but attempts to win Gandalf to an alliance:

*"And listen Gandalf, my old friend and helper!" he said, coming nearer and speaking in a softer voice. "I said we, for we it may be, if you will join with me."* <sup>49</sup>

When Gandalf rejects his overtures, he determines to keep him imprisoned until such a time as he might change his mind.

The second sees a reversal of rôles; this time Gandalf has Saruman trapped in Orthanc, and in one of the novel's most dramatic scenes, deposes his erstwhile chief and assumes his primacy and the colour white. What is being played out in these two episodes is a dramatisation of the process Jung calls differentiation; the struggle between the personal self and its darker counterpart, the Shadow, for



mastery of the person. Saruman, as the Shadow, has become debased by his appetites; he is a materialist, covetous of artifacts and the power inherent in them. It is no accident that Gandalf has '*passed through fire and death*' between these two scenes. Fire and death, as so often in mythic patterns, represent purification and rebirth. It is this that entitles him to the prestigious epithet 'the White'. When, in the second scene, he stands triumphant before Orthanc, the Self triumphant over the baser lusts of its Shadow, he cannot treat Saruman with the harshness with which he himself was treated in the earlier scene, for such would compromise the victory. He must temper his ascendancy with mercy, as befits the purged soul. The conflict may be viewed generally as the archetypal conflict between the beast and the god in man, and as such creates resonances in every individual, or more specifically, it is a psychological study of Vocation. Both wizards begin with the same mission; Saruman, initially the more powerful, is still weak enough to become seduced by Sauron; Gandalf's power increases through his conflict with his counterpart and he is able to accomplish their task.

The same struggle can be readily observed in other complementary light and dark pairings, not only in the realm of myth - the Egyptian brothers, Osiris and Set, for example, - but is also played out in the Scriptures. The conflicting contrast of the dark king, Saul, and the light king, David, is a case in point. If once the theory of the Archetypes be accepted, then common sense tells us that the Scriptures, along with all other mythic products of the collective imagination of an entire society, will be a rich source for such images. Indeed Jung and many of his followers have written extensive studies of the archetypal configurations in the Old Testament, and it is to those that I must refer the reader, as too detailed a discussion of them would move beyond the remit of this thesis. My purpose in discussing but a few of the archetypal images in Tolkien's work is to emphasise the possibility that the reaction of the unconscious mind to his writings may be qualitatively similar, or perhaps even identical, with its reactions to imagery of the same kind in genuine scripture, and that, furthermore, such a reaction may be one of highly-charged psychological and emotional resonances that



proceed from the very depths of our consciousness. Thus the reader with the sort of mind receptive to Tolkien's work - and as Shippey has pointed out, not all readers have such a mind - will experience something far more profound than a merely intellectual equation of an image in The Lord of the Rings with an image in the Old Testament. He may feel the tremor of an ancestral memory-form that harks back to the dawn of human awareness; to the very period of integrated consciousness that Barfield has drawn our attention to, and which the myth-makers have categorized as pre-lapsarian.

### Indeterminate Religious Imagery

In addition to specifically determinable Christian imagery, typified by that which alludes to the concept of messiahship and discussed at length above, Tolkien also makes use of a more indeterminate form of religious imagery that is nevertheless pervasive and deserves consideration. It takes the form, not of a specific image, but is rather the object of a persistent allusiveness, the full effect of which is a cumulative one. Furthermore it is not specifically Christian in character, but rather relates to more vaguely defined spiritual matters; religious, that is, in the wider sense of the term. Two examples, considered in some detail, should demonstrate its function.

The stars that hang in the Ilmen, the middle air, above Middle-earth are a persistent image that constantly recur in The Silmarillion and retain a similar spiritual function in The Lord of the Rings. We have already discussed the theme of the diminution of the Light in Chapter Three. We should note that the stars preceded the risings of the Sun and the Moon, and indeed the older stars, those of the first Starkindling, precede even the two light-giving trees of Valinor, and being of great antiquity, were the first things seen by the awakening Elves. They are the work of Varda, Queen of the Valar in her capacity as Elentári, the Star-Queen, who, as one of the 'offspring of [the] thoughts' of Ilúvatar, represents a

personification of the light of the Divine Presence. Her stars, spread out against the darkness of the heavens, therefore come to represent a token of that Presence. We are told that Varda made most of the stars in the earliest days of the shaping of the world. However a second Starkindling takes place just before the awakening of the Elves to serve as beacons of hope for the Firstborn, at which - 'a great labour, greatest of all the works of the Valar since their coming into Arda' she re-arranges the ancient stars into recognisable patterns, or constellations, to serve as signs, and from the liquid light from the tree Telperion she creates new stars, brighter and nearer to the earth: the planetary bodies.

The Elves come to revere the stars, associating them with their own sense of self-identity, calling themselves the *eldar*, 'people of the stars'. Varda, as their maker, is revered to a far greater extent than any other Vala, being praised under the names of Elbereth and Gilthoniel, and we have already noted the echo of the Marian imagery implicit in her rôle as *stella mater*. When most of the Elves travel across the Western oceans to take up their abode in the Undyinglands, in the very home of Varda, the identity between light and divine presence seems to become even stronger, so that when the Noldorian Elves defy the Valar and return to Middle-earth seeking the stolen *silmarilli*, the stars then take on the added poignancy of a symbol of exile; a token of their fallenness. They still signify the Divine Presence within creation, but now are impossibly far away, especially for those who were erstwhile dwellers in the full glory of the Light. Appropriately the redemption of the Noldor is intimately bound up in the story of a star. Eärendil, half-elf and half-man, sails into the West to beg the forgiveness of the Valar on behalf of both his peoples, and is permitted to pass the Leaguer set by the Valar around the Undyinglands to bar the re-entry of the exiles, because of the light of the *silmaril* he wears bound to his brow. The *silmarilli* contain some of the self-same light from the Two Trees from which Varda made the stars and are therefore deemed sacred jewels. As a result of Eärendil's petitioning, the Valar wage the War of Wrath against the Enemy and permit those of the exiles who wish to return to the Undyinglands to do so. Eärendil himself, the *silmaril*

shining on his brow, henceforth sails the heavens nightly in his ship Vingilot, as the Evening Star: 'it rose unlooked for, glittering and bright; and the people of Middle-earth beheld it from afar and wondered, and they took it for a sign, and called it Gil-Estel, the Star of High Hope' <sup>50</sup>.

The equation of the stars with Hope - one of the three theological virtues, let us not forget - is carried on into the Third Age in The Lord of the Rings. We might note the suggestive etymological coincidence of the name Estel, the pseudonym given to Aragorn during childhood to conceal his identity from enemies,<sup>51</sup> which approximates too closely to the English adjective 'stellar': in Sindarin, we are told, Estel means 'hope'. Stars fulfil precisely this symbolic function in Sam's song on the stairs of the Tower of Cirith Ungol:

*Though here at journey's end I lie,  
in darkness buried deep,  
beyond all reach of towers strong,  
beyond all mountains steep,  
above all shadows rides the Sun  
and Stars for ever dwell:  
I will not say that Day is done,  
nor bid the stars farewell.*<sup>52</sup>

Sam is inspired in making up this song: 'suddenly new strength rose in him, and his voice rang out, while words of his own came unbidden to fit the simple tune'. The Lady of the Stars, we should recall, as the personification of Ilúvatar's Divine Light, also represents his creative inspiration. Sam has been able to pass the malevolent will of the Two Watchers, vulture-headed statues that guard the gate of Cirith Ungol, only with the aid of the phial given to Frodo by Galadriel. This, 'the Lady's Starglass', contains the light of Eärendil's star (i.e. a silmaril) caught in the reflection of Galadriel's Mirror. It had first proved its worth shortly before, when its light had been used to deter the monstrous spider, Shelob. In Sam's desperate battle with her, which echoes in miniature the



slaying of the dragon Ancalagon the Black by Eärendil himself in the War of Wrath,<sup>53</sup> the hobbit - who knows no elvish tongues - is inspired to cry out an invocation to Varda the Star-Kindler 'in a language which he did not know'. At these words, we are told the phial

*'flamed like a star that leaping from the firmament sears the dark air with intolerable light. No such terror out of heaven had ever burned in Shelob's face before. The beams of it entered into her wounded head and scorched it with unbearable pain, and the dreadful infection of light spread from eye to eye.'* <sup>54</sup>

In addition to the recurring symbolism of the stars representing hope, brightest in the darkest hours, that runs throughout Tolkien's works, we should also note the unique position they occupy as a point of contact between the secondary world of Middle-earth and our own Primary world. Tolkien has made numerous references to Middle-earth being geographically identical with north-western Europe, though the succession of apocalyptic upheavals that he records have altered the maps beyond recognition. The sole entities that exist in our own world that can be clearly identified with those in Tolkien's creation are the stars. Helluin is Sirius,<sup>55</sup> and red Borgil may be identified as either Betelgeuse or Aldebaran<sup>56</sup>. Of the constellations of the Second Starkindling we can pick out Wilwarin ('the butterfly') as Cassiopeia, Remmirath ('the netted stars') as the Pleiades), Menelmacar ('the Swordsman of the Sky'), 'with his shining belt, that forebodes the Last Battle that shall be at the end of days', who is specifically identified with Orion, and the Valacirca ('the Sickle of the Gods'), which is the Great Bear, 'a sign of Doom' to all things evil. Most of the planets can be identified by their elvish etymologies. We already know that Eärendil as the Evening Star is Venus. Carnil, 'the red light', is undoubtedly Mars, and Alcarinquë 'the glorious' is surely our Jupiter. Lumbar, from lumbar = 'heavy shadow', is likely to signify Saturn, if we are to assume Varda's planets retain something of the traditional astrological associations of our own western tradition, and likewise is Nenar - 'watery-fire'?- likely to



be Neptune. If Luinil ('blue-light') is Uranus (assuming the latter two planets are visible from earth to the keen naked eye of an Elf), then only Elemmirë remains to be attributed to Mercury.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the significance of the stars is that, as symbols of exile, of our fallen nature, on the one hand, but also of Hope; hope that that fall shall one day be transcended and the exiles recalled, of the fact that the Divine Presence still abides in creation, they have endured from the first age, well into the Fourth Age, the Dominion of Men in which we now live. Tolkien would almost certainly agree that our need of them is as great now as it ever was.

A second example of this indeterminate but persistent imagery is one already touched upon in the previous chapter, the phenomenon of what Tolkien calls the sea-longing as a symbol for man's profound need for the numinous, for a sense of otherness that is capable of achieving a spiritual equivalent of Tolkienian Recovery. The nearest the characters of The Silmarillion come to anything resembling a religious experience is almost invariably bound up with some sort of mystical reaction to the sea. We have already seen how Tuor experienced a full-blown epiphany, with the sea god, Ulmo, rising from the ocean like a great wave, though most examples of Ulmo communicating with Men and Elves are in a lower key: *'But mostly Ulmo speaks....with voices that are heard only as the music of water.'* Indeed music is frequently associated with the sea-longing, which is hardly surprising since, quite apart from common poetic conceit of water in motion sounding musical, music is the most insubstantial and 'otherly' of all the arts. Thus, in Tolkien we read that *'of all most deeply was [Ulmo] instructed by Ilúvatar in music.'*<sup>58</sup> and it is in water that an echo of the very Music of Creation can still be heard, though only, it would seem, by those who are spiritually inclined, such as Tuor. Ulmo possesses the Ulumúri, a set of great horns made for him by his companion, Salmar, *'and those to whom that music comes hear it ever after in their hearts, and longing for the sea never leaves them.'*<sup>59</sup>

The Third Kindred of the Elves, the Teleri, are, as a race, enamoured of the sea, and are great mariners, plying the littoral of the Undying Lands and the waters around Tol Eressea in their swan-

shaped ships.. Here again the musical connection is apparent; they call themselves the *Lindar*, 'the singers', while Tolkien's original name for them was the *Solosimpi*, 'the shoreland-pipers'. Those of the Children of Ilúvatar, particularly the Elves, who have never encountered the sea are at especial risk from the sea-longing when they come into contact with the ocean, by which Tolkien may be indicating the awakening of the need for the numinous, a search for meaning and fulfilment, that frequently takes -people in middle-life. Legolas, son of Thranduil, king of the Wood-elves of Mirkwood, has never seen the sea - as a Silven Elf his forebears abandoned the westward march to the Undyinglands in the earliest of days. settling instead on the eastern side of the Misty mountains. However, when the resurrected Gandalf catches up with him in Fangorn Forest, he brings him a message from the Lady Galadriel :

*Legolas Greenleaf, long under tree*

*In joy thou hast lived. Beware of the Sea!*

*If thou hearest the cry of the gull on the shore,*

*Thy heart shall rest in the forest no-more. 60*

The longing that is to come upon him is to sail westwards to Elvenholm, to experience the celestial light that is his birthright, and indeed the appendices tell us that after the death of Aragorn, Legolas built a ship and passed westwards, taking his friend Gimli with him. But it is indeed significant that when Legolas first receives Galadriel's message, he assumes, as his words to Gimli indicate, that she is foretelling his death. There seems to be a distinct association between the longing for the indeterminate otherness of existence and the mysteries of death, a theme which is most fully explored in the mysterious eventual fate of Frodo.

The symbolism of the soul passing by boat over the western sea is a common metaphor for death in northern folk traditions. Norse funerals frequently took the form of the body being launched onto the ocean in a fire-ship, which Tolkien commemorates in his account of Boromir's funeral rites, the fallen warrior being placed in an elven boat and entrusted to the River Anduin and the western sea

beyond. So deeply entrenched was the notion of death as a sea journey into the west that later Germanic funeral customs that came to favour interment for great chieftains still retained the ship, in which the fallen warrior would be laid, surrounded by grave goods, and a tumulus raised over the entire ship, as was found at the celebrated East-Anglian Saxon site at Sutton Hoo. Within the myth cycles, the most famous example of the westward sea-voyage is that of the departure of King Arthur, lying in a barge, attended by maidens, bound for the Isle of Avalon, where some suppose his wounds would be healed. Tolkien deliberately taps into this mythic tradition in naming the citadel and port on the elven Isle of Tol Eressea 'Avallónë', while cleverly tying its etymology to his own mythos, claiming it means '(city) closest to Valinor'.

In the fate of Frodo, Tolkien maintains the ambiguity of Arthur's passing, since it is not clear what awaits him on the Farthest Shore. Arwen, having renounced her immortality in marrying Aragorn, cedes her place in the White Ship to Frodo, telling him *"If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed."*<sup>61</sup> Against this, however, we must weigh Saruman's last words to Frodo: *"Do not expect me to wish you health and long life. You shall have neither. But that is not my doing. I merely foretell."*<sup>62</sup> If we are to believe Saruman's words - and I think we are, since his disclaimer of responsibility gives this utterance a quite different tone from his earlier bluff about a curse falling on the Shire if his blood is spilt upon it - then Arwen's promise to Frodo takes on an ambiguous character. If he is to dwell in the Undying Lands until he is healed, then he will confound Saruman's prediction that he shall not enjoy a long life. Can it be, then, that the healing for his wounds and the release from his grief are the healing and release that come with the especial gift of Ilúvatar to Men: death?

Until the last chapter of The Lord of the Rings, Frodo has never actually seen the sea. He first sees an image of it in Galadriel's mirror, at a point in the narrative when the fact that his own death seems likely -whatever the outcome of his quest- is being underlined by the explanation that Lórien, and all else generated and protected



by the Three Elven Rings, must suffer a similarly ambivalent fate. In the water he sees a great storm (symbolizing the War of the Ring that is about to erupt), out of which the fleet of the Corsairs sails up the river to Minas Tirith, although captained, as we shall later learn, not by the pirates of Umbar, but by Aragorn (a symbol of eucatastrophe; the vision of the black-sailed fleet is identical to that which Denethor sees in the palantír that drives him to insane despair, although the reality proves to be hope unlooked for coming unexpectedly from the western sea, just as Ulmo has told Tuor that "*the hope of the Noldor lies ever in the West, and cometh from the Sea.*") Frodo's vision then changes to one of his own departure from Middle-earth, a small ship that passes away westwards, twinkling with lights, though he is not able, for the moment, to recognise it as such.

It is with regard to the hobbits, from whose view-point the narrative of The Lord of the Rings remains, with the exception of only a few incidents, that the indeterminate imagery of the sea as symbol for that spiritual longing experienced by those who are aware of their fallen nature, becomes most telling. Hobbits, we are told, associate the ocean with Elvenkind: "*The thought of the Sea was ever-present in the background of hobbit imagination.*"<sup>63</sup>, which is born out by the prevalence of the motif in 'hobbit poetry', such as that presented in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. This is ostensibly a collection of poems, both formally presented and marginalia, taken from the Red Book, and penned by various hobbit hands. Fastitocalon, The Last Ship and The Sea-bell all feature sea-voyages, the latter two to Elvenholm (Avallónë, on Tol Eressea) in the West. But Tolkien, in his persona of redactive editor and translator of 'original' hobbitish material, goes on to add that "*fear of [the sea], and distrust of Elvish lore, was the prevailing mood in the Shire at the end of the Third Age, and that mood was certainly not entirely dispensed with by the events and changes with which the Age ended.*"<sup>64</sup> The implication here is that the Hobbits of the Shire, prosaic, unimaginative and complacently secular, seem to lack any sense of, or need for, the numinous.

But what can Tolkien be suggesting by this? Surely not that a

warm-hearted, easy-going, comfortable race such as this should not be in need of redemption? This seems greatly unlikely, since Tolkien goes to the trouble of reminding us that the Hobbits are as fallen as any other race. He provides us with an account of Sméagol's murder of his cousin, Déagol, for possession of the Ring, recapitulating, in diminished form, the fall of the sons of Fëanor through the Kinslaying. The hobbits' fallen nature can be seen instanced in the petty spite, sarcasm and intolerance of hobbits like Ted Sandyman, the snobbery and greed of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins and the stupidity of Lotho. Of course, Tolkien being Tolkien, their closeness to their natural environment goes some way to exculpating them; their "close friendship with the earth" <sup>65</sup> brings them close to the truth of the Creator as revealed in his creation, but it is in their lack of imagination, and consequently, their ignorance, that the hobbits' fallenness most inheres. They have lived for many years, fancying themselves secure, as Aragorn remarks at Bree, quite unaware that it is only the constant patrols of the Rangers that prevent the foul servants of the Enemy from entering the Shire. The hobbits' paradisaical existence is a fool's paradise, as the damage done to the Shire by Saruman within a few short months testifies. A lack of the faculty to apprehend the sense of fallenness - that sense which manifests itself in a longing for restitution, for a sense of otherness - also implies ignorance of the dangers of the fallen condition. Hobbits - or what Tolkien really means, those of us of hobbitish dispositions - are easy prey to the agents of darkness that beset us round, like the monsters around the Beowulfian hero, unless, like the four hobbit members of the Company of the Ring, we learn to turn our attention to higher things, to raise our sights above our everyday comforts and conveniences. Tolkien's clearest statement on this subject is put in the mouth of Merry, as he recuperates in the Houses of Healing in Minas Tirith, after his valiant part in the slaying of the Nazgûl-King. Pippin remarks: *"Dear me! We Tooks and Brandybucks, we can't live long on the heights."* to which Merry replies:

St Paul calls 'living in the spirit' rather than 'living in the world'. It is for this reason that he is spiritually best suited for the task of carrying the Ring to its destruction, since he is able to imagine most fully the nature of the Evil against which he is pitted. Even the imaginative Sam shies away from contemplating the darker sides of the stories Mr Bilbo taught him (*"There was a lot more...all about Mordor. I didn't learn that part. It gave me the shivers"*)<sup>67</sup> In accepting the quest, evil is able to go to work on Frodo's mind, leaving him permanently damaged, but the fact that the quest is brought to a successful conclusion at all is because evil for Frodo is not only a metaphysical but also a psychological reality, and not some part of a nursery tale such as Ted Sandyman would sneer at while really rather not thinking about.

This then is why Frodo takes ship with Bilbo at the end of the book and sails into the west to seek healing in the Undying Lands. The healing he seeks, like Eärendil before him, may be read as an attempt to transcend their fallen condition, although, as Tolkien makes clear, nothing is assured: 'hope, without guarantees'. It is at this point that the symbolic import of the *mythos* comes to out-weigh the straightforward meaning of the narrative. Such a transcendence as Frodo seeks is one that, thanks to the gift of Ilúvatar to Men, may only be attainable beyond the Undying Lands, beyond the very confines of Arda, in the celestial Halls of Ilúvatar himself.

Tolkien indicates that towards the end of his life, Sam, that most well-adjusted of hobbits, who several times makes clear his horror of water and boats, goes to the Grey Havens and takes ship for the west, following his old master. Perhaps it is worth asking, to what ends; what healing does he require? Sam, it is true, was a Ringbearer, although for the shortest tenure, and he took no hurt from it. This, presumably, was because he carried it for less than a day, but of equal importance is surely the fact that, just as Bilbo was partially shielded from the Ring's ill effects "because he began his ownership with pity", so Sam began his with love, devotion to duty and - in his common-sensical rejection of his initial Ring-induced inflationary fantasy of 'Samwise the Great, striding into Mordor' - with humility. The only indirect hurt that Sam takes is his separation from his



beloved master at the Grey Havens, and for that he is compensated with his marriage to Rosie and their many children. In having Sam give up all this - significantly in his old age - to follow a former master who, in terms of the narrative, may well be dead, Tolkien is surely confirming that the westward voyage is to be understood at the symbolic level of a turning towards the spiritual; a common phenomenon in latter life.

To some extent, Sam's separation from Frodo at the Havens may be read as a dramatisation of the social and emotional difficulties that occur when a close friend or relative chooses to renounce the world and live a life of exclusive religious vocation, perhaps in a monastic order. Tension between what the religious sees as the demands of God and obligations to loved ones is inevitable, and this may well underlie Tolkien's most sustained examination of the phenomenon of the Sea-longing. The tale of Aldarion and Erendis, subtitled 'The Mariner's Wife', occurs in The Unfinished Tales, and at one level is the closest Tolkien came to writing a domestic fiction. It deals with the difficult, and at times, diffident, courtship and marriage of Aldarion, first heir-presumptive and later King of Núminor in the Second Age, with Erendis, a beautiful maiden of a lesser royal line. Aldarion becomes enamoured of the sea at an early age, giving occasion for one of Tolkien's most arresting descriptions of the sea-longing:

*Then suddenly the sea-longing took him as though a great hand had been laid on his throat, and his heart hammered and his breath was stopped. He strove for the mastery, and at length he turned his back and continued on his journey.<sup>68</sup>*

Aldarion founds the Guild of Venturers, dedicated to exploring and charting the western and southern coasts of Middle-earth. His frequent absences from Núminor, sometimes for over ten years at a time (we must recall that the line of the Kings of Núminor had greatly extended life spans), and his persistent refusal to perform his royal duty by selecting a wife, cause his father, Tar-Meneldur considerable distress. But Aldarion's obsession with the sea cannot

be held in check, even by his father's forbidding him any more voyages. His love for Erendis is sincere, even though it is long in kindling, but even this cannot keep him from his voyaging. Eventually he bows to pressure and proposes to Erendis, promising to put the sea out of his mind, and for some time he manages to do so, but it is now Erendis' turn to prevaricate. She is sceptical that he will ever be free of its enchantment, going so far as to call Uinen, the maia of the sea, her rival for his love. She knows the lot of the wife of a mariner and it is not the kind of marriage she wants. Erendis loves the woodlands and has a horror of the ocean, and so rejects Aldarion's suggestion that she should accompany him on any future voyages. In schematic terms, Aldarion is possessed by a mystical devotion to the numinous,<sup>69</sup> to the sublimity of the unchecked power and limitless space of the ocean; Erendis, on the other hand, while certainly not devoid of spiritual feeling, as her devotion to the inland forests indicates, but she represents the social demands of family life - as future queen of Núminor it is her duty to produce heirs, and as a member of a cadet branch of the royal house, her years are not lengthened to the extent that are those of Aldarion. These are the emotional ties that are inherently antagonistic to the sea-wandering monastic. This story may also contain a suggestion that mystical devotion to the numinous is also incompatible with sexual relations; several commentators have remarked upon Tolkien's great reluctance to admit sexuality into his sub-creation, and it is with some justice that it has been variously observed that the nearest examples of actual sexual encounters in The Lord of the Rings are Sam's wounding of Shelob, and the homoerotic suggestiveness of the relationship between Sam and Frodo, which culminates in the orc tower of Cirith Ungol, with Sam cradling the naked Frodo in his arms. Just as significantly, it has also been observed that Tolkien seeks to defuse any such homoerotic interpretation by masking it with heavily religious language: thus the scene just described takes on an echo of the *Pieta*.<sup>70</sup>

Finally I wish to return to the sea imagery in the 'hobbitish poems' in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. The most significant, for our purposes, is also the most problematic. The Sea-bell is largely

a revision of a poem Tolkien published in 1934, under the title Looney. Both present a picture of a wanderer who sails west in a boat to a deserted elven shore, who is pursued by black clouds and storm winds until he takes ship once again for his own land, where he is shunned by other men. The Sea-bell of the 1962 version is, however, far bleaker and brooding than the earlier version, reflecting a deepening pessimism in the aging Tolkien. While interesting in the present context from the point of view of the religious connotations of the sea imagery employed, the problematic aspect of the poem is manufactured by Tolkien himself in his pseudo-critical introduction, in which he comments that The Sea-bell as he found it in the Red Book has the words *Frodo's Dreme* scrawled at the top, in the manner of a sub-title. Though he does admit that the poem "is most unlikely to have been written by Frodo himself",<sup>71</sup> he goes on to observe that "the title shows that it was associated with the dark and despairing dreams which visited him in March and October during his last three years."

Taken by itself, The Sea-bell is quite out of character with the other hobbitish poems in the collection - except perhaps for The Last Ship and even that lacks its bleak disillusionment. Whereas most hobbit verse is, "at least on the surface, light-hearted and frivolous", The Sea-bell is a desolate vision of utter alienation and dispossession. It begins with its narrator - associated with, if not identifiable as, Frodo - picking up a sea shell and hearing in it the echo of a bell on a buoy in some distant harbour of Fäerie. An empty boat drifts near, and, seized with a sense of time running short ("It's later than late! Why do we wait?"), he leaps in and is born away. He is landed on an elven shore, which in the context of Tolkien's mythology, must be Tol Eressea, the Lonely Isle that stands off-shore from the Undying Lands and is partially lit by a shaft of light from Valinor that shines through a gap in the Encircling Mountains. The beach is covered in glistening sand: "dust of pearl and jewel-grist", recalling the diamond dust which coated Eärendil's shoes and clothing as he entered the streets of Tirion on Tol Eressea.<sup>72</sup> But here, unlike in the earlier version of the poem, a dark note is sounded almost immediately: "under cliff-eaves there



were glooming caves, weed-curtained, dark and grey", and the light begins to fade. What would otherwise be a pastoral, wooded landscape is described in details heavy in the symbolism of death. Over a slow-moving, weed-choked river grow alders, traditionally a tree of ill-omen, and weeping willows, associated with mourning and those who have been abandoned. The foliage on the banks is described in terms of weaponry, bringers of death: "green-spears, and arrow heads", and irises described as 'gladdon swords', recalling the Gladden Fields where the One Ring betrayed Isildur to his death. The fauna is described in funereal terms; the hares are a ghostly white, and other animals mentioned are characteristically nocturnal - voles, 'brocks', and moths, a symbol of the soul since the myth of Psyche.

The wanderer hears music and dancing, but hastening towards it, constantly finds that the dancers have fled before he reaches them. Unlike Smith of Wooton Major, marked out for favour by the King of Fäerie by the star on his brow, who is permitted not only to range at will throughout the Fäerie realm, but also to join in the dancing with no less a personage than the Queen of Fäerie, the wanderer in The Sea-bell is denied the full experience of the Elven realm, suggesting that his presence there is that of an interloper. Denied the company of the Eldar, he makes a foolish mistake in an episode not to be found in the earlier version of the poem. He decks himself out in leaves ("Of river-leaves and rush-sheaves/ I made me a mantle of jewel-green/ A tall wand to hold and a flag of gold"), and crowned with flowers, in a scene reminiscent of King Lear's flower-bedecked madness on Dover beach, he proclaims himself king of that land, and commands its inhabitants to show themselves. What he is doing, in effect, is attempting to possess the land of Fäerie, to force it to become part of his own experience, rather than allowing it to come to him, in indeterminate and perhaps brief glimpses. One cannot command the numinous, nor, unless trained in advanced mystical techniques, experience it at will. The wanderer's crime is, in a lesser and rather ridiculous form, that of Ar-Pharazôn, the last king of Núminor, who landed on the same shores with a great army to wrest immortality from the Valar. The effect upon the wanderer is accordingly lesser than on Ar-Pharazôn, though is nevertheless personally disastrous. A

black cloud gathers over him, plunging him into darkness, and hounds him on his hands and knees to take refuge in an ancient, rotting wood. Here the imagery is that of decay, not only of the dead trees, where "beetles were tapping", in the manner of deathwatches, but also of his mind, as he sits there "wandering in wits" for "a year and a day". When at last light pierces the wood he returns to his senses, but only partially. *"I have lost myself, and I know not the way."* The phrase is a chilling one as it is not a tautology: besides not knowing the way back to the shore, he has lost himself in the sense of becoming separated from his sense of identity. In this way Gollum surely loses a part of himself when he loses the Ring, and we must assume that this phenomenon, which the psychologists call 'loss of soul', or *abaissement du niveau mental*,<sup>73</sup> is common to all the Ring-bearers. If the wanderer is to be associated with the maimed Frodo, then this cry from the heart brings us closest to a statement of Frodo's sickness. It echos, in a negative fashion, the words with which Frodo accepted his quest: *"I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way."* But whereas that statement was a positive affirmation of hope, in that, even though he did not know the way, he would, with help, find it, the wanderer's complaint offers no hope.

Tearing through briars, he is pursued by the darkness 'like a hunting bat', until he stumbles on the shore, where the boat still awaits him. It bears him back across the sea to the place he started out from, though it can no-longer be called home. He is changed by his experience, and finds all houses shuttered against him, while all men shun him as he wanders the highways in rags. This final, desolate figure, who has thrown away all his belongings, irresistibly recalls Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*. Tolkien's wanderer, his 'hair hanging grey', closely resembles Coleridge's 'grey-beard loon', and that phrase itself is strongly suggestive of some direct influence in view of Tolkien's original title for the poem being *Looney*. Both have been mariners who have encountered supernatural phenomenon in inhospitable environments, that seem to stand as metaphors for death, and both have spent periods of insensibility; both now frighten their fellow men whom they meet on the roadside. Indeed in his final aspect, as an other-worldly exile, he closely resembles another of

Coleridge's characters; that of whom, in Kubla Khan, the people cry:

*Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round his thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of paradise.*

Tolkien draws attention to his wanderer's long hair, turned grey, and to his similarly flashing eyes, which 'shone like the star-sheen'. The public reaction to these characters who have become 'fey' as a result of their intense spiritual experience, is typified by the general attitudes of the hobbits of the Shire who, as Tolkien has told us in his preface, treat the sea and all things elven with suspicion.

Two inter-twined questions remain to be answered: how does The Sea-bell relate to our understanding of the nature of Frodo's fate, and what does it add to the spiritually impregnated sea imagery that Tolkien has made so much of? Tolkien tells us that this poem, which is dated from the Fourth Age, had become associated with Frodo because of its melancholic content, but this is to say very little. It merely serves to advance his sub-creation a little further beyond the end of The Lord of the Rings by extending the fiction of hobbits compiling and indeed scribbling marginalia in the Red Book. What though was his real intention in deliberately associating a poem thirty years old with Frodo, a character he had not even conceived at the time of the composition of Looney? Of course, Tolkien being Tolkien, we might choose to answer that he intended no more than the effect of extension just described, yet another scholarly joke, but I think enough has been said in the above discussion of the poem to indicate that there are strong resonances in the re-written The Sea-bell with what we must suppose Frodo's state of mind to have been in his last three years in the Shire, and that his understanding of Frodo's plight may have prompted the re-writing of the poem. The sea voyage once again represents the quest for the numinous object that may heal the soul (which is to say, accomplish the redemption of fallen man), which accounts for the alacrity with which the Wanderer



leaps into the boat. His wandering the sea shore at the beginning of the poem, engaging in whistful actions like placing shells to his ear, indicates that he knows his soul is sick. He is actively seeking healing, and he believes his time is short. He therefore seizes the opportunity of the boat the moment it presents itself.

Once on the shores of Fäerie, however, he is too peremptory. It is one thing to recognise and lament one's fallen condition, but it is quite another, steeped in the heresy of Pelagius, to expect that one can actively acquire redemption without the intervention of Grace. The Sea-bell, within the context of his *legendarium*, is quite the most doctrinally Catholic of all Tolkien's Middle-earth writings, and it is unsurprising that in its bleaker revised form it belongs to the latter years of his life. The Wanderer finds he is not considered worthy of the paradise he expected to find once aboard the boat and heading Westwards. Its finer aspects are quickly withdrawn from him, and he is plunged into a hell of darkness, decay and witlessness. When finally released from it, by the light, we note, the operation of Grace, he is returned to his starting point, but discovers that for him there can never really be any going back. His lot is now a purgatorial one, trapped between two worlds, without - for the moment - belonging to either. I use the phrase 'for the moment' with some reservation, since there is no token of hope at the conclusion of this desolate poem. In fact, when revising Looney, Tolkien removed the sea-bell, which in the earlier work remains with the Wanderer at the end to remind him of Fäerie, to the beginning of The Sea-bell where it acts as a catalyst to the action, which afterwards leaves the narrator bereft of any possessions whatever. But the fact that he cannot ever again belong in his own world indicates that a change has taken place in him - N.B. his own cry, "I have lost myself"; might this not be part of the operation of Grace? After all, on his return, he does throw away all his belongings, which is surely a clear renunciation of that possessiveness that led him to such folly on the Farthest Shore, and possessiveness of this sort, as shall become clear in the next chapter, is the great anathema for Tolkien.

If this poem be allowed to represent Frodo's state of mind prior to his departure at the Grey Havens, then the true damage of the

Ring can be seen. The Ring has now gone, but since it possessed part of Frodo's mind, part of him has gone with it: he has, in accepting the quest, lost part of himself, just as surely as the Ring's destruction led to a massive hæmorrhage of Sauron's being. While stopping short of that most damning of Catholic sins, despair, Frodo has come to doubt the possibility of his own salvation.

In this chapter I have tried to highlight the ways in which Tolkien uses religious - often, but not always, Christian - imagery. We have noted, in passing, how strikingly archetypal many of his images and patterns are, and that these archetypes are likely to be recastings of the same fundamental thought-forms that originally yielded the great images of the scriptures. We have also considered the more allusive, non-specific form of 'themed' imagery, which operates on a more intellectual, rather than visual, level. Taken together with the arguments in Chapter Four, which explored the ways in which Tolkien moulds language forms to invoke the atmosphere of scripture, we may agree with some certainty that Tolkien makes a great effort to make his works redolent of scripture, without of course ever simply allegorizing scriptural stories. We have already discussed his belief in the importance of reading and writing fantasy, and other religious ideas have emerged in the course of our consideration of imagery. But the time has now come to ask ourselves one question: if we may assume that his works constitute a Tolkienian scripture, are they cohesive enough to sustain a Tolkienian theology? What, in other words, have his works to say on the great theological questions?

## NOTES : CHAPTER FIVE

1. "I dislike allegory wherever I smell it" is but one of Tolkien's recorded objections to the allegorical mode, this quoted by Carpenter in the Biography, p.99. The principal reason for his hostility to this particular literary form, despite having written at least two (Leaf by Niggle and Smith of Wootton Major), seems to have been his concern to refute the speculations of some critics who saw The Lord of the Rings as a political allegory of the 1940s and '50s, with Mordor, the menace in the East, representing Nazi Germany and/or the Cold War U.S.S.R. However, as Dr Filmer has shown, the term allegory has a wider sense, and The Lord of the Rings is not only capable of sustaining an interpretation that seeks to view it as an allegory of the human condition, but positively invites it.
2. "It is sad that 'Narnia' and all that part of C.S. Lewis's work should remain outside the range of my sympathy, as much of my work was outside his." (Tolkien in The Letters.)  
Joe Christopher subjects this lack of 'sympathy' to a full analysis in J.R.R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile.
3. Tolkien, The Lost Road
4. *idem.*, O.F.S.
5. *idem.* The Letters, p.237
6. Robert Graves, King Jesus: although it is, strictly speaking, a work of fiction, I do not hesitate to quote from its rather intrusive discourses on comparative mythology and archaic beliefs, areas in which Graves is acknowledged to be a meticulous scholar.
7. Daniel 7:xi-xiii
8. Geza Vermeš comments that "in the mind of the author of Daniel &, 'one like the son of man' is not an individual, it is 'a human being elevated above the wicked beasts and



*granted everlasting dominion over all things, a symbolic representation, according to interpretive conclusion, of the eschatological triumph of the historical Israel"* However this may be, all commentators agree that whether a symbol or an individual, the type of the Son of Man is inextricably associated with the apocalyptic, and as such the imagery is appropriate to Gandalf the White.

9. Isaiah 52 & 53

10. Tolkien, R.K. pp.58-9

11. *ibid.* p.153

12. Tolkien gives some justification for this comparison with the twin Kingdoms of Judah and Israel:

*In many ways [the Númenorians of Gondor] resembled 'Egyptians' - the love of, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive. And in their great interest in ancestry and tombs. (But not of course in 'theology': in which respect they were Hebraic and even more puritan)*

[Letters; p.281, my emphasis.]

It is, of course, in the area of their 'theology' that this study is interested. While Tolkien is almost certainly here referring to the fidelity of the House of Elendil to the Valar and to Ilúvatar beyond, it is tempting to speculate on how much further this conscious identification of the Númenorian Kingdoms with the Israelitish realms might have shaped his mythology. We might note, for example, that outside the area of 'theology', the southern Kingdom of Judah, like Gondor, also far surpassed its Northern counterpart in scale of its building - though admittedly nothing like on the Egyptian scale. Nothing in the Israelitish realms could compare with the Southern capital of Jerusalem; in addition to the Temple were great edifices like the House of the Forests of Lebanon and the residential palace that Solomon built for himself. The most the North could boast was the city of Sumaria, built by Omri and Ahab in the Ninth Century B.C., but this, while opulently ornamented, could not compare with Jerusalem in scale.

Further significance may be found in the fact that the great building works of Jerusalem date from the time of the unified Kingdom under David and Solomon, while the city of Minas Tirith was largely built during the reign of Elendil, who as father of Isildur and Anárion, unifies the Kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor in his person.

13. F.R. p. 230

14. Kocher, Master of Middle Earth, pp131-132

15. e.g. Luke 5:xiv ; Matthew 9:xxx

16. R.K. p. 298, quoted by Wyntenbroek.

17. The Poetry of Fantasy in Tolkien and the Critics

18. Psalms 47:1-11

19. R.K. Appendix B (p. 457)

20. The Istari, like any other created being in Arda, are capable of undergoing a Fall; a fact that Tolkien links specifically to the doctrine of their incarnation:

*'...strange indeed though it may seem, the Istari, being clad in bodies of Middle-earth, might even as Men and Elves fall away from their purpose, and do evil, forgetting the good in the search for power to effect it.'* (The Istari; in The Unfinished Tales p. 391)

21. Tolkien, U.T. p. 393

22. *idem* T.T. p. 119

23. *ibid.* pp180-181

24. e.g. F.R. p. 344, and R.K. pp. 15-17.

25. Book of Daniel, 3.xxv.

26. Tolkien, U.T. p. 391

27. *ibid.* p. 393

28. *ibid.* p. 391

29. *idem* F.R. p. 520

30. Luke 4:v-vi

31. Only, that is, the Cross as burden, or instrument of torture. The Ring within its context always remains intrinsically evil. In subsequent Christian tradition and iconography the Cross has taken on an almost talismanic aspect - a symbol of redemption - and as such its corollary within Tolkien's

Secondary world is the White Tree of Gondor. Note the reference to it in Gwaihir's Song:

*And the Tree that was withered shall be renewed  
and he shall find it in the high places,  
and the City shall be blessed.*

32. F.R. p. 354
33. Carpenter, The Biography
34. To this end, Tolkien began a sequel to The Lord of the Rings, entitled *The New Shadow*, which was to tell of the rise of a Morgoth-worshipping cult among the youth of Gondor during the reign of Aragorn's son, but the manuscript was abandoned after a few pages.
35. Tree and Leaf p. 64
36. Tolkien in Guide to the Names in Middle Earth in A Tolkien Compass p. 201
37. Giddings, This Far Land, p. 10
38. Tolkien corresponded in affectionate terms with Farrer's wife, Katherine, a writer of detective fiction, and indeed was on intimate enough terms with the couple to offer financial assistance at a time when they were both beset by ill-health and difficult circumstances.
39. Farrer, A Rebirth of Images, p. 17
40. Ibid.
41. The letter to Peter Hastings (The Letters pp. 187-196) contains a warning that his work should not be taken too seriously.
42. Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 7
43. Jung, Collected Works Vol. 9 §1 ¶155
44. This Archetype is embodied in Alpine folklore in the person of the Old Man of the Mountains. Before going up to Oxford in 1911, Tolkien took a walking tour of Switzerland, during which he bought a postcard reproduction showing this character in the form of Madlener's *Der Berggeist*, or spirit of the mountains. He preserved the card for many years inside a paper cover on which, years later, he inscribed the words 'Origin of Gandalf'.



45. F. R. p. 89
46. Numerous commentators have compared The Lord of the Rings to Wagner's Ring Cycle, an equation Tolkien strenuously denied, commenting that both stories involved magical rings, and there the similarity ended. The striking resemblance between the Wotan and Gandalf figures would seem to give the lie to his denial. But the psychological impact of the resemblance is primarily archetypal; this being acknowledged, Tolkien's resistance to such comparisons can be seen to be understandable in terms of the two sagas having very different thematic contents. Northrop Frye's description of The Lord of the Rings as "a high-anglican Ring of the Niebelung" (Urang, p.104) need not be taken too seriously on any count. Frye had a slight opinion of Tolkien's achievements, and his refusal to take the works themselves - as opposed to the popular reaction to them - seriously, is reflected in his uncharacteristic error in describing them as 'high-Anglican'. He is, of course, factually wrong, but had he argued that the works had the character of a Catholic Niebelungenlied he would still have been wrong.
47. F. R. p. 339
48. *ibid.* p. 338
49. *ibid.* p. 339
50. *idem* S11. p. 301
51. *idem* T. T. p. 416
52. *idem* R. K. p. 220
53. *idem* S11. p. 303
54. *idem* T. T. p. 425
55. *idem* S11. (index) p. 403
56. Foster, The Complete Guide p. 51
57. At the time of this work's submission, an hitherto unknown manuscript of Tolkien's, from the Marquette University Collection, has been described as part of the tenth volume of The History of Middle Earth, Morgoth's Ring. It confirms my attribution of the elven planetary names to Mars, Jupiter, Mercury and Saturn. *Nénar* was indeed originally attributed to

Neptune, but Tolkien seems to have changed his mind, since the 'N' written above the name Nénar is scratched out. Luinil is the only name not superscripted with the initial letter of one of our own planets. Christopher Tolkien believes that his father may have originally given the name Nénar to Neptune as a piece of philological whimsey, because of its association with water, but later changed his mind for the same reason; i.e. that it amounted to a bastardizing of mythologies, since Neptune's association with water dates only from its arbitrary naming in 1846, and there could be little reason for the Elves to have made any similar association. We must conclude, therefore, that Nénar finally became the planet Uranus, while Luinil was bestowed upon Neptune. I have noted this rather trivial problem of nomenclature in some detail because of the insight it provides into the seriousness with which Tolkien regarded the consonance of his creation.

58. Tolkien, *Sil.* p. 20

59. *ibid.* p. 29

60. T. T. p. 130

61. R. K. p. 306

62. *ibid.* p. 364

63. A. T. B. pp. 81-82

64. *loc. cit.*

65. F. R. p. 18

66. R. K. p. 174

67. F. R. p. 250

68. U. T.

69. It would surely not be straining credibility too far to suggest that Tolkien intended a semantic echo of the word *numinous* in the name of the island of Númenor, given its place within his legendarium, as a symbol of lost fulfilment over the western seas.

70. Partridge, *No Sex Please*, in *This Far Land* (ed. Giddings)

71. Tolkien, A. T. B. p. 81

72. *idem* *Sil.* p. 299

73. Janet, in Les Névroses, cited by Jung in Concerning Rebirth.  
74. With the exception of Sam, who bore it only for a few hours.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE EXISTENTIAL HOBBIT

#### Demythologizing Fiction

In the foregoing chapters I have argued from a position that Tolkien's major fictional works are capable of functioning, and do function, in a manner very similar to Scripture, and furthermore, that the similarity is one of quality, rather than mere analogy. If this argument be accepted, I shall have achieved my aim of demonstrating Tolkien to be a religious writer in the second sense defined in the Introduction, and this being given, a demonstration of his corresponding to the first definition of a religious writer may be unproblematically proceeded to. But what is the extent of the similarity between Tolkien's works and scripture? Can it be tested further?

We have seen that much of Tolkien's language is of a deliberately biblical tone, and that this accounts for much of its narrative power; we have seen also that his imagery is carefully calculated to evoke not merely general mythic (i.e. spiritually-grounded) Archetypes, but archetypal images with a subtly Christian echo achieved by a quality-by-association technique. We have also discussed how the re-casting of these central archetypal images can operate at a deep psychological level on the modern reader, achieving an emotive impact not unlike scripture. But scripture is surely something more than the sum total of ponderous language, highly-charged sub-conscious images and emotionally-cathartic stories. There is an identifiable

dialectic embedded at the heart of scripture from which is derived the the essential character of Judao-Christian ethical and theological structures; a dialectic which implies something in the nature of a policy? After all, Archetypes, for all the pregnant power that Jung attributes to them, may be actualized and activated for good or ill, since in themselves they remain neutral entities. In the world of the unconscious "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". One of the basic moves of the Jungian psychotherapist consists in convincing the subject that there is nothing necessarily 'evil' about the Shadow personality.' A wholly evil Shadow could only exist antithetically to a wholly good Persona, and the Persona, being by its very nature an artificial psychological construct, is rarely, if ever, that. What I mean by the *policy* of the Bible is that which determines its morally imperative tone, that which unequivocally commends the path of God, light and goodness and condemns the devil, darkness and evil. The Ten Commandments are not neutral statements pointing out that for the sake of social and domestic harmony it might be the practical thing for man to refrain from theft, murder, covetousness &c. but rather are a series of uncompromising dictates, obedience to which, or the lack of it, imply very real *metaphysical* consequences. It is this scriptural dialectic, which may be mythically expressed as being between God and the devil, or existentially as between good and ill, that guarantees the predominance of scripture over all other forms of texts, confirming as it does an hitherto unknown written Authority.

Tolkien can write authoritatively, but of course even at his best his works fall far short of the the imperative sweep of the Bible, all the more so since the moral values we employ in judging Tolkien are themselves derived from the Bible. This admission however in no way militates against my thesis: I have argued that Tolkien's texts *aspire* to a scriptural authority, though of course they fail to attain it. If Tolkien ever had achieved a comparable degree of authority, his work would have been, *de facto*, Scripture. But is this then to conclude that the only difference between Biblical scripture and religious fiction is the degree of Authority exhibited, deriving from the strength of the internal textual dialectic? Were this the case,

then there is no logical reason why one day a creative artist might not, given sufficient diligence and talent, produce a new Christian scripture. At this point the traditional Christian interjection is that the difference between Scripture and any presumptuous literary fiction is that the former is the divinely inspired word of God. Against this it must be observed that such an hypothesis is purely conjectural, depending as it does on the faith of the believer. Tolkien's Christian conception of the Sub-creative act makes a very similar claim; i.e. that Sub-created fiction is similarly inspired by God the Creator, and indeed may be viewed as as much a product of that primary Act of Creation as the seas and mountain ranges of our Primary world. If this be accepted, then it follows that the principal difference between a Christian romance - or for that matter the most secular and 'realist' of novels - and the Bible is one of degree rather than quality. It is important however to understand aright the movement of this argument; far from reducing the status of Scripture to that of particularly superior fiction, the status of fiction is raised to the foot of that plinth that is traditionally reserved for Scripture.

The nature of what I have presumed to call the 'policy' of the Bible is what Rudolf Bultmann was concerned to clarify by means of his famous *Entmythologisierung*, or demythologizing method.<sup>2</sup> His contention is that the Kerygma of the New Testament is an existential reality here and now, but is presented therein in terms of supernatural happenings in a mythological cosmos, which render it quite incomprehensible, in these terms, to contemporary man. For example, Christ's physical ascension into heaven is twice described by Luke, which clearly asserts the existence of a heaven that is physical and is located above the earth. Countering this celestial region is Sheol, located beneath our feet in the bowels of the earth. But it is no longer possible, in Bultmann's view, for modern, scientific man to believe in a physical, spatially-located heaven, nor in its celestial denizens, just as it is impossible to believe that epileptic fits are the result of demonic possession. What then are we to make of the Ascension, and for that matter, of the other mythic events of the Gospels - the miracles, the virgin birth, the



Resurrection itself? Bultmann's answer is clear; they must be stripped of their mythological flesh in order to reveal the bones of existential truth, the core of truth that speaks directly to modern man of his own existence, rather than restricting itself to the experiences of a group of men and women who lived two thousand years ago.

There can be little doubt that such a proposed systematic myth-breaking would have caused Tolkien untold alarm, so it comes as a surprise to find that Bultmann's position and his own are not so very far apart. Unlike the old Liberal Theologians of the end of the last century, Bultmann has no desire to ignore the embarrassingly mythic episodes, but rather recognized them to be of the utmost importance to the Kerygma. Similarly he acknowledges that myths are not lies, that they do contain important truths, but truths that cannot be fully revealed to the conscious mind without first reducing them to an existential abstraction.<sup>3</sup> But it is here that Tolkien and he part company, since for Tolkien the Truth is more properly understood at a deeper, intuitive, level, from the contemplation of the beauty of the myth in its wholeness; *"he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom"*.<sup>4</sup> He expands the point further in his essay, Beowulf: the Monster and the Critics:

*The significance of myth is not easily pinned down on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; who presents it incarnate in the world of history and geography....myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected."*<sup>5</sup>

Bultmann, however, seems unwilling or else unable to go all the way. This is hardly surprising, as the New Testament for Bultmann is, in the words of Karl Barth;

*the document of a message (kerygma, proclamation, preaching). It is that and that alone. This means that the usual lines of*

*demarcation between exegesis and systematic theology are entirely abolished.<sup>6</sup>*

Yet for all the abolition of these demarcation lines, Bultmann's insistence on the subservience of all else to the message of the text<sup>7</sup> places him firmly on the opposite side to Tolkien in the Primary/Secondary language dichotomy noted in the first chapter. For Bultmann, the text is merely the vehicle for meaning, for the Kerygma, and no more: it is *about* something other than itself; for Tolkien the text, as *mythos*, *is* the meaning, and is intuitively comprehended in its entirety. But from this distinction, we notice a striking similarity between Bultmann and Tolkien's position; both are uninterested in the abstractions of systematic theology, and insist upon the reader's direct involvement with the text, whether as 'vehicles of the message',<sup>8</sup> or as participants in the literary/divine act of sub-creation. One might also observe that the principal difference between the two writers reflects the characteristic divergence of their respective denominations; with Tolkien's Catholic enthusiasm for spiritual symbolism contrasting with Bultmann's protestant insistence on the practical message of Scripture.

Bultmann admits that a complete demythologization of the New Testament is too gargantuan a task for one man to attempt,<sup>9</sup> and contents himself with what is in itself a project of daunting proportions; namely the existential interpretation of the contrasting New Testament portraits of the life lived with Christ, and that lived without. But he is forced to admit that the action of Grace, which transforms the latter into the former, cannot be demythologized.<sup>10</sup> The nature of our fallen condition disallows man to make the transition to the state of grace, or 'life with Christ', of his own volition, since that very attempt will constitute a fallen action. Since the belief that man can control his own existence is itself a part of that sinful, fallen state, man is led to regard sin as a mythological expression. Bultmann implies that in doing this man is wrong, and can only see himself aright through the saving, illuminating power of the Kerygma of Christ, which is exclusively the gift of God. This is all very well, but what Bultmann is in fact

doing is taking two steps back from the myths of the New Testament Scriptures to contemplate their fundamentals from the imagined certainty of the myths of the theologians. That is to say, that any discourse that refers to God, the Christ, or to man's Fallen condition, is necessarily mythic. God, being by definition ineffable and incomprehensible, can only be conceived in metaphoric or mythic terms. To demythologize the concept of God would be to reduce him to his point of existential contact with our experience: since the experience of God is inevitably non-cognitive (were this not so, God's existence could be effectively proved with logic), any attempt to represent the experience to the cognitive faculties must employ a metaphor. Therefore even a demythologized God remains enveloped in myth.

Part of the reason for Bultmann's difficulties here is his inconsistent application of his understanding of the nature of myth. The two principal mythic aspects of the New Testament that he cites as standing between a Kerygma rooted in a pre-scientific world and its comprehensibility to modern man are the mythological, three-tier universe, with heaven above, Sheol below, with the earth sandwiched between them, prone to the intervention of the denizens of its two neighbouring worlds, and belief in daemonic possession. Modern physics and astronomy has shattered any prospect of belief in the former, while medical research has provided less invidious aetiologies for the latter. However both of these examples demonstrate Bultmann falling into the trap Frye has warned us against; that of crassly regarding myth as an attempt at a proto-scientific view of the world around us, rather than of our inter-relations with the world. This is curious, since Bultmann's general understanding of the nature of myth is, again, closer to Tolkien's than we may imagine; mythologies, he assumes, are not cosmological, but anthropological - or 'anthropocentric', as Frye would prefer.' Thus, myths that speak of God, the Fall of Man, Grace, or indeed a Kerygma, those with which Bultmann is chiefly occupied, are not of a different order from those



addressing cosmological order. If the former are correctly to be understood as addressing themselves rather to man's experience of the spiritual, rather than physical, world, so too must the latter category of myth. Bultmann is aware of this point, and it is this which leads him to insist on the need to interpret myths anthropologically, or *existentially*, as he has it. The awkward *impasse* which arises in his essay, that of demanding the demythologizing of Scripture and then admitting that some of it cannot be demythologized, seems to arise out of a certain lack of consistency of application of the principle of anthropocentric myth. Only the cosmological myths are cited as reasons for why we must demythologize Scripture, whereas the more obviously anthropocentric ones, which are Bultmann's real area of subsequent interest, are those which he admits are incapable of a total exegesis.

One cannot help feeling that if he is right in his principal claim, it should be all or nothing. The point at which he draws the line (i.e. at the operation of Grace) seems, as he presents it, to be quite arbitrary. After all, there are still those who are able, in the teeth of scientific evidence, to maintain an actual belief in the aspects of the mythic cosmos that Bultmann declares hopelessly obsolete; how many more are there who have no problem in accepting the anthropocentric myths of God, man and kerygma as described in *the Bible*, and who neither require nor desire an existential rendition. There are many, including Tolkien, with his insistence that he believed in dragons, who find the poetry of the myth a more suitable vehicle for a higher, purer belief than the philosophical abstraction that is yielded by demythologizing. Science itself, the great demythologizer, has itself become in the popular view a vast network of neo-mythologies. If, with Frye's help, we have been able to pinpoint the reason for some types of myth failing to prove amenable to demythologization, we should also take account of Frye's warning that *all* myths, particularly that of the mythological universe, are anthropocentric in character.<sup>12</sup>

Is there any value then to the demythologizing method? I think there is, but that value lies chiefly in the field of literary criticism, rather than theology. It is, in fact, what literary critics

have been doing to works of fiction and drama from Aristotle onwards without perhaps being aware of it. What the twentieth century has found it necessary to call 'serious literature', to distinguish it from mass produced, formulaic pulp fiction, achieves that status by providing more than just a story about invented characters; it provides an existential insight into the experience of us all. Few readers of Dostoyevsky, one would hope, have ever murdered an old woman for personal gain. Those few who have will no doubt find Crime and Punishment a powerful work. Yet so to do the rest of us, whose hands are unstained with blood, since the work achieves an existential distillation of human experience. If we are honest with ourselves, we recognize that we are each of us capable of committing such an act, though we might never dream of doing so. Dostoyevsky forces us to acknowledge this by providing us with a work that is not just an apparently simply a story - a myth - about a young Russian student named Raskolnikov who kills an old woman and finds he cannot live with the guilt, but also that which may be demythologized into its existential components, a psychodrama in which the reader imaginatively becomes Raskolnikov and vicariously experiences his anguish. The literary critic's rôle is to extract the universal kernel from the fiction, but of course the intelligent reader does so automatically as he reads. The truth of the fiction is understood intuitively, as Tolkien insists the truth of the myth is experienced to the full only by leaving the myth intact.

Be that as it may, and I have to say that my own sympathies lie with Tolkien in this, my current task is to demonstrate Tolkien's religious concerns by highlighting his works' affinities with Scripture. To this end I intend to flout Tolkien's preference and attempt an existential interpretation of key aspects of The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings, to uncover the authorial dialectic, or policy, implicit in these works. As we shall see, Tolkien has very pronounced views on the nature of evil, free will and determinism, power and authority, temptation and sacrifice, and each is mythologized in his fiction, and that, furthermore, these views are fully consistent with, and indeed seem to proceed from, the principles of Sub-creation examined in previous chapters. Taken

together they present a religious - specifically Christian - and æsthetic dialectic that parallels the 'policy' of the Bible.

There are even instances of Tolkien demythologizing his own work, as for example when he writes :

*Of course, in fact exterior to my story, Elves and Men are just different aspects of the Humane, and represent the problem of death as seen by a finite but willing and self-conscious person,<sup>13</sup>*

And more succinctly, he refers to the structure of The Lord of the Rings as having been "planned to be 'hobbito-centric', that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble."<sup>14</sup>

### The Theodicean Problem

Any theistic mythology of the Judeo-Christian pattern contains at its roots one of the perennial problems of Western philosophy; the justification of the existence of evil within the Creation of a good God. The classic formulation of the problem may be represented as follows:

All such theistic systems tend to rest on three premises:

- i) God is omnipotent and omniscient.
- ii) God is perfect (i.e. wholly good)
- iii) Evil exists in the world

Logic dictates that it is impossible that all three of these propositions be true, since the combination of any two automatically precludes the possibility of the truth of the third. The problem is exacerbated if we enquire not only into the existence of evil, but also its origin. If God is the author of everything then we must assume that he not only permits evil but must also be its uttermost source. In this context we might uncomfortably recall Isaiah 45:vi: *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I*



*the Lord do all these things.*

Within Tolkien's mythology there is little room for doubt that the Creator is omnipotent. Ilúvatar, the name by which the Elves call him, means 'All-Father', or 'Father of All', which Paul Kocher reads as his pleromic aspect of total being. He is Eru, the One.<sup>15</sup> Similarly there are numerous indications of his omniscience, ( his knowledge that Aulë is secretly creating the Dwarves, for example). He is originally the sole being, existing beyond Time and Space:

*There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he first made the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thoughts, and they were with him before all else was made.<sup>16</sup>*

This, the opening sentence of The Silmarillion, immediately provides a clue to the exact nature of Ilúvatar, and to that of the Ainur. The latter personify his thoughts. It is as though, as the All-Father, the Godhead is compartmentalized, each component being imbrued with an autonomous consciousness, while at a deeper level of reality, Eru, the One, is indivisible, preserving his infinite psyche whole and intact. This model bears a striking resemblance to that postulated by the Jungians to explain the autonomy of the individual consciousness, which at a deeper level meets the infinitude of the collective unconscious, just as the bed of the sea provides a common ground for each individual island in an archipelago. The model also echoes much older spiritual constructions, such as the model of the Pleroma and its Emanations of Valantinian gnosticism.<sup>17</sup> We might note also that this is but the first such movement of division and limitation, which we observed in Chapter Three, and which Robley Evans has pointed to as characterizing the movement of history in Tolkien's world;

*In this version of world-creation, development of the secondary world is not organic but cellular, contracting into smaller units, narrower perceptions, a degenerative process of*

*divisions leading to further divisions and to the narrowing of perceptions in created beings* <sup>18</sup>

The formal dissociation of God's omniscience from the rest of the eternal mind is personified in the Vala Námo (or Mandos), the Doomsman of the Valar; *'he forgets nothing and he knows all things that shall be, save only those that lie still in the Freedom of Ilúvatar'*.<sup>19</sup> Omniscience, it would seem, does not preclude the possibility of the Godhead changing its mind, and nor does it diminish God's status to that of an external observer. The 'Freedom of Ilúvatar' safeguards his omnipotence, his ability to act within the world, as he does at Manwë's request when Valinor is assailed by Ar-Pharazôn's army.<sup>20</sup>

That Tolkien intends to portray Ilúvatar as being wholly good is similarly unquestionable. Three times the discords of Melkor mar the Music of Creation; on the first occasion Ilúvatar merely smiles and begins a new theme; on the second, *'the Ainur perceived his countenance was stern'*; at the third disruption, as the cacophony rises to its climax:

*In the midst of the strife, whereat the Halls of Ilúvatar shook and a tremor ran out into the silences as yet unmoved, Ilúvatar arose a third time, and his face was terrible to behold. And then he raised up both his hands and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light in the eye of Ilúvatar, the Music ceased.* <sup>21</sup>

The Creator then explains his transcendent cosmic design:

*'And thou, Melkor, shalt see, that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.'*<sup>22</sup>

(It will be noted that this amounts to a dramatized statement of the principle of Sub-creation, and as we shall see, characterized Tolkien's entire approach to theological issues.) Since the music here referred to is subsequently given Being, becoming *Arda*, the created world, evil is therefore woven into the fabric of Creation at the outset in the form of the proud Melkor's vain attempts to create independently of the Creator, which is the opposite action to that carried out by the rest of the Ainur, who sub-create within the theme propounded to them by Ilúvatar.

Thus all three theistic propositions seem to be affirmed within Tolkien's mythology. The all-powerful Creator is a perfect being, and yet evil exists in the created world. But Ilúvatar's words, quoted above, seem to push us towards the classic question-begging response to the problem: that what we call 'evil' is really part of the divine plan, working towards a greater good than we creatures are capable of perceiving. But is this all Tolkien has to say on the problem of evil? If so, then there is little more to engage us, and the phenomenon of evil in The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion is reduced to mere allegory.

In fact Tolkien has a great deal more to say about the evil that 'hath its uttermost source' in Ilúvatar. Speaking generally, two distinct views may be taken of the nature of evil. The first, which prevails in the New Testament, is the dualist school, which portrays evil as an actual force or presence, capable of seducing and possessing its adherents. This school has always commanded immense mass appeal, from the Serpent of Genesis, through the Satans of Dante and Milton, to the extravagances of Aleister Crowley and the Order of the Golden Dawn, and the less than edifying works of Dennis Wheatley in our own day. The scholastics of the late Middle Ages, however, were only too aware that any theory of personalised evil played straight into the theodicean problem described above, and working from St Augustine, abstracted an alternative view of evil; evil as the privation of goodness. This school maintains that everything was initially created perfect, but time and free will has resulted in a falling away from God, a progressive degeneration.

Tolkien makes extensive use of both notions of evil. As a story-



teller he is fully aware that the concept of actualized, personal evil is undoubtedly the more dramatic of the two, and whatever theological and philosophical arguments we might identify in his work, we must remember that Tolkien is first and foremost a literary artist, and as such we cannot ignore his literary artistry. Thus he presents us with chillingly memorable scenes, which, at their best, rival the imagery of Dante and Milton: Melkor, renamed Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World, enthroned in his terrifying subterranean fortress of Angband, the air thick with palpable darkness and shaken with the anguished cries of tormented elves and men; at his feet lies the monstrous wolf, Carcharoth, while on his brow rests the Iron Crown, in which are set the three silmarilli, his theft of which has plunged the elven kindreds into bloody civil war. This is the kind of picture which is almost *de rigueur* against the apocalyptic, John Martin style backdrops of The Silmarillion, but Tolkien's most skilful use of personified evil is to be found in The Lord of the Rings, in which its intrusion into pastoral settings heightens the effect through contrast. Three notable instances will serve to illustrate my point.

The first is the Nazgûl, the Ring Wraiths of Sauron, who make their first chilling appearance as the Black Riders, casting their shadow over the sun-lit, rustic landscape of the Shire.<sup>23</sup> Incongruity serves to prepare the reader for the eventual revelation of their true nature. The hobbits, merrily making their way along a country lane, hear the hooves of a rider's mount on the road behind them. Their assumption is that it must be the long-overdue Gandalf hastening to catch them up, but Frodo's unease prompts them to hide by the side of the road to observe the rider's identity before he sees them, disguising his wariness as a prank to surprise Gandalf. The rider however proves to be a man, swathed from head to foot in a great black cloak, its cowl pulled down over the face, despite the warm September sunshine. The incongruity is enhanced when the Rider stops and, rather than looking and listening about him, he begins a curious snuffling, as though trying to sniff out a suspected prey. The menace of this single rider is multiplied when he is joined by his eight identical fellows, who are able to communicate over long distances by means of their chilling cry: 'a long-drawn wail came on

*the wind, like the cry of some evil and lonely creature'. Aragorn later explains that these were once proud and noble men, kings and warriors, who were ensnared by Sauron through their will to power. They have become wraiths, their being stretched over many centuries, not by the gift of more life but by their allotted span of life being infinitely extended until every moment is a painful weariness, "like butter that has been scraped over too much bread", as Bilbo pertinently expresses it. The menace of the Nazgûl is that of the fear of the unknown, until they attack the travellers in their encampment under Weathertop and Frodo puts on the Ring. It is the Ring's power that ensnared the Nazgûl, that defines their shadow-world, and in putting on the Ring, Frodo enters into that world:*

*Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes became terribly clear. He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him...Two of the figures halted. The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helm was a crown. <sup>24</sup>*

From this point on, they become creatures of horror, apocalyptic in nature. Treloar has compared them to the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, though apart from the fact that both groups represent personified evil, I can see no similarity beyond the fact that both ride horses. Tolkien wisely chooses not to sustain any comparison by drowning the Nazgûl's mounts at the ford of Bruinen at the close of Book I, whereafter they take on a more overtly apocalyptic rôle, riding on hideous flying creatures of a vaguely pterosaurian nature. Their leader, the Witch-King of Angmar, is discovered to be a powerful sorcerer, and takes on the rôle of Sauron's demonic captain, leading the Morgul army in the great assault on Gondor. In his confront-ation with Gandalf at the gates of Minas Tirith he is

revealed in all his horror, throwing back his hood to reveal an iron crown and two flaming red eyes, but no visible head. The fact that the Nazgûl have lost their own identities, to have them replaced by the brutal will of Sauron enhances, rather than diminishes their stature as personifications of evil. All other dimensions of their character have long since withered away, leaving only the rapacious malevolence of the Dark Lord, wrapped in a black cloak.

Sauron himself is perhaps Tolkien's most striking depiction of personified evil, which is all the more remarkable in that he, the eponymous Lord of the Rings, never actually appears in person in the novel. But his black will is everywhere apparent; he is the eternally absent presence, which Tolkien, perhaps aware of the trap that Milton fell into in his depiction of Satan, wisely and effectively represents through the symbol of the all-seeing, lidless Eye, which *'was rimmed with fire, but was itself yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothingness'*. Frodo, as his possession of the Ring gradually possesses him, becomes increasingly aware of the presence of the Eye, searching for him, for the Ring, yet unable to locate them. In the Second Age, as we are told in *The Silmarillion's Akallabêth*, Sauron, being caught up in the Downfall of Númenor, loses the ability to appear fair to men's eyes, but what he actually looks like in the Third Age is never made clear. We know that he does not take on the physical form of an eye since we are told that Isildur had cut the ring from his finger. Sauron's physical body, no doubt hideous to the eyes of men, had been slain on this previous occasion, but at the time of the War of the Ring he has taken on a new physical form, though, according to Gollum, he still lacks a ring finger. It is this very indeterminacy that underwrites his capacity to inspire terror.

' "Dangerous?"' says Gandalf to Gimli, "And so am I, very dangerous: more dangerous than anything you will ever meet, unless you be brought alive before the seat of the Dark Lord",<sup>25</sup> and it is the anonymity of the occupant of that seat, the reference to a symbol of his power rather than the wielder himself, that enhances the sense of danger. But Sauron is a very real presence, far more than just the symbolism of the Eye. Ensconced in the Dark Tower of Barad-Dûr, he



creations, she does not derive her name from any of his invented etymologies, being simply a she-lob, a female spider, perhaps emphasising the separateness of Shelob from Middle-earth, and from the conflict between the Dark Lord and the West. For all Sauron feeds her like a cat and finds her presence in the Cirith Ungol useful, he knows that Shelob is a creature of immense power who serves no-one but herself, just as Melkor was unable to control Ungoliant.

Much of the horror of Shelob derives from her gross physicality, and several commentators have remarked upon the explicitly sexual imagery in Tolkien's description of her battle with Sam, armed with a phallic sword,<sup>29</sup> she representing the physical, predatory aspects of womanhood that have been expunged from the characters of Arwen, Galadriel and the like.

She yielded to the stroke, and then heaved up the great bag of her belly high above Sam's head. Poison frothed and bubbled from the wound. Now splaying her legs she drove her huge bulk down on him again....With both hands he held the elven blade point upwards,...and so Shelob....thrust herself upon a bitter spike. Deep, deep it pricked as Sam was crushed slowly to the ground.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, this conflict enacts the ancient motif of the hero slaying the dragon, the dragon invariably representing personified evil. Sam's heroic achievement is paid full tribute by Tolkien, who comments: ' *Not the doughtiest soldier of old Gondor, nor the most savage orc entrapped, had ever thus endured her, or set blade to her beloved flesh.*' The bloated, stinking flesh of her body is indeed beloved by Shelob, one again emphasising her physicality. But she is beloved of another creature also: Gollum has long ago pledged his faith to her, and actively worships her. As the object of such ghastly veneration she is the type of the demonic idol, the counterpart to Varda, Queen of the Stars, who's light, contained in the Starglass, Shelob is unable to endure. Finally we might note the resemblance between Shelob and Milton's Sin, both of whom are ghastly

females who guard the gateway of the infernal realm.

For all its dramatic possibilities, however, personified evil remains a philosophically crude notion, and not one that can readily sustain an attempted demythologization. It is not one that Tolkien in his mythopoeic capacity wants to build into the fabric of Middle Earth, and in fact specifically denies it: "*Nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so,*" Elrond tells the Council, and nor, for that matter, was Sauron's corrupting mentor, Melkor. This point is a crucial one in countering the hostile criticism of writers like Edmund Wilson,<sup>31</sup> who have sought to portray Tolkien's works as ethically facile tales of Good Guys in white hats, who are totally good, fighting Bad Guys in black hoods, who are wholly evil.

The Tolkienian cosmos is a theistic hierarchy; a Chain of Being. Beyond Arda, the physical and temporal world, is the Supreme Being, Ilúvatar, beneath whom are ranged the Ainur, angelic beings which Tolkien, with a nod in the direction of Dionysos the Aereopagite, restricts to only two orders, the primary order, or Valar as the fourteen who make their home in the created world are known, and the secondary order, the Maiar. The fourteen Valar with an unspecified number of Maiar in attendance, stand as the earthbound heads of the Chain of Being, beneath whom are ranged the four races of Free Peoples. The Children of Ilúvatar take precedence; Elves, the Firstborn, and Men, the Followers. After them come the Dwarves and the Ents, two races 'created' by the Valar, and not part of the original vision of the world, yet sanctified by Ilúvatar's blessing, the Freedom of Ilúvatar allowing Him to weave their destinies into the fabric of history. Antithetical to this hierarchy of Order is an hierarchy of Chaos, headed by the fallen Ainu, Melkor, his servants Sauron, Gothmog and a host of other corrupted maiar and men. Beneath these are the orcs and trolls, perversions of elves and ents, with significantly little capacity for independent will.

According to Augustine's followers, evil is a privation of good, the cumulative process described by Evans' term *degenerative recurrence*. Applied to Tolkien's mythology, this implies that the further a being falls away from the presence of the Perfect Creator, the more he will be deprived of that perfection, i.e. he will descend

into evil. Furthermore, pro-created beings are necessarily further from the source of creation than their original ancestors who were created *ex nihilo*, perfection diminishing with the number of generations. Treloar argues a convincing case for this being the pattern adopted by Tolkien the medievalist. All created beings, as Elrond says, were created good. Melkor was the greatest of the Ainur, *'having a share in each of the gifts of his brethren'*; Sauron was a *maia* of the Vala Aulë; the Balrogs likewise were *maiar*, fire-spirits, who were seduced by Melkor. Saruman, the apostasizing wizard had been the greatest in power of the Istari, coming first to Middle-earth to combat the growing influence of Sauron on behalf of the Valar. His appetite for knowledge, coupled with his overweening pride, led him to a deep study of Ring-lore, attempting to uncover the mechanics of Sauron's power, at first so that he and the White Council might undermine or undo it, but later, as his pride in his learning waxed, that he might match Sauron with his own power, perhaps even by the construction of a ring of power of his own. His conceit leads him straight into the snare of Sauron's designs; two beings of very similar origin, their hubristic intellects draw them to similar dooms. When Saruman is brought down, to wander Middle Earth as a beggar, Frodo recalls his tragic degeneration: "*he was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hand against. He is fallen...*"<sup>33</sup>

Creatures of evil who can not be shown to have begun in a state of grace can inevitably be explained as the pro-created offspring of beings once noble. Shelob, for example, may be viewed as an example not so much of moral, but of genetic, degeneracy. The Spiders of Mirkwood in *The Hobbit* seem likely to be Shelob's offspring, described as *'her lesser brood'*<sup>34</sup>. Similarly, as we have observed, the orcs were bred, by the malice of Melkor, in mockery of the elves, perhaps, as *The Silmarillion* speculates, from captured and tortured elves, though the latest extant account of the origin of the orcs, while acknowledging some problems of chronology, argues that they were bred from captured Men.<sup>34a</sup>

The degenerative theory recalls the gnostic philosophy of Valentinus, which postulates a Godhead, or *Pleroma*, which is in itself



perfect, from which emanate thirty-three aeons. Somewhere along the line, Achamoth, or Corruption enters the chain of emanations, tainting the lower aeons, which can only be redeemed by the self-sacrifice of the final aeon, a syzygy consisting of the Messiah and his bride, Sophia. These descend into the physical world, itself the product of Ialdabaoth, the evil demiurge, at the furthest remove from the perfection of the Pleroma. In Tolkien, the physical world is also the work of demiurges - the Ainur - but these illustrate the sub-creative principle by working within the divine theme expounded by Ilúvatar, and it is his Sacred Flame - which Kocher argues represents the Holy Spirit and as such is part of the trinitarian Eru, along with Ilúvatar the Father - that is set at the heart of Creation to give it Being.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore the deity who sustains Creation in a continual act of presence, as described by Aquinas.

Notable anomalies do, however, present themselves when the privation theory of evil is applied to Tolkien's cosmos. The most striking is that the first falling away from the godhead, that of Melkor, is the greatest fall. As the greatest of the Ainur, the beloved of Ilúvatar, Melkor might be expected to have been the greatest of all created beings; his tragedy resides in his inability to accept his condition as a creature. If the privation theory be rigorously applied, we might have expected the second Dark Lord, Sauron, to have been more steeped in evil than his predecessor, Melkor, but this is not so. His willingness to acknowledge Melkor as his master, even after Melkor's destruction and banishment beyond the confines of the world, his even going so far as to induce the men of Númenor to worship Melkor, indicates Sauron's recognition that he is not a *sui generis* head of the chain of being, something Melkor, along with Milton's Satan, would never acknowledge. The Ents constitute another anomaly; for all they were not figured in the Music of Creation, and were the last - demiurgically - created of the Free Peoples, they exhibit a nobler nature than the grossly materialistic dwarves<sup>36</sup>.

So while we may accept that Tolkien makes extensive use of personal, or dualistic, evil for artistic effect, and broadly espouses the philosophical opinion that Creation has an entropic tendency to

fall apart at the seams, a phenomenon we call 'evil', he seems also to hint at a more specific view of evil; a hint which, if taken up, can lead us to a peculiarly Tolkienesque ontology of evil.

We can proceed by firmly ruling out what Tolkien does not intend by evil. He rejects any notion of Manichaeian dualism: Melkor is the creature of Ilúvatar and is denied the ability to create in his own right; *'No theme shall be played that hath not its uttermost source in me'*. All Melkor can manage is to warp and corrupt. *"The Shadow that bred them cannot make"* says Frodo of the orcs, *"Not real, new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them."* Dualist cosmologies are largely incompatible with privation theories of evil, but before leaving the subject, I want to give careful consideration to Tolkien's treatment of physical matter. While the Halls of Ilúvatar are immaterial, as are he and the Ainur, the creation of the physical world is described as an act of great spiritual significance, the end to which the Ainur were created. Each Ainu takes up the theme of Ilúvatar and develops and embellishes it according to his thoughts, weaving into it something of his specific nature. Ilúvatar then shows them a vision of their song, a vision of the as yet uncreated world;

*'I know the desire of your minds, that what ye have seen shall verily be, not only in your thoughts but even as ye yourselves are, and yet other. Therefore I say: Eä! Let these things Be! And I shall send forth into the void the Flame Imperishable and it shall be at the heart of the World and the world shall Be!'"*

This important passage identifies three states of existence. An object may exist in the mind, as an idea or vision, and such is the musical creation of the Ainur, both in its pristine form as Song, and in its visual rendering, "a light in sound, a sound-like power in light", as Coleridge has it. Secondly it may possess an actual though ideal, or spiritual existence; the Ainur are beings of spiritual substance, as presumably is Ilúvatar, since there are references to his countenance and to his hands. The third state is indicated by the phrase *'as ye yourselves are and yet other'*. Material substance is

brought into being with the fiat *Eä!* and it is the Flame, variously described as Sacred, Holy and Imperishable, that gives and sustains its existence. The Flame is more than just a metaphor for the creative impulse - the music has already provided that. It represents the creative aspect of Ilúvatar, the part of Eru that is eternally immanent in the physical world. Thus we should be reluctant to say that, in the gnostic sense, physical matter may be thought of as being intrinsically corrupt or evil.

When some of the Ainur enter into Arda as the Valar and Maiar, we are told they *'took to themselves shapes and hue; and because they were drawn into the world by love of the Children of Ilúvatar they took shapes after the manner which they had beheld in the Vision'*. It was not made clear in the earlier published writings (i.e. *The Silmarillion*) whether these visible bodies, or *fanar*, are physical or phantasmal, in the sense that the Docetists attributed a phantasmal body to Christ. Tolkien remarks that *'the shapes wherein the Great Ones array themselves are not at all times like to the shapes of the kings and queens of the Children of Ilúvatar; for at times they may clothe themselves in their own thought, made visible in forms of majesty and dread<sup>33</sup>*, which may mean that the Valar were capable of taking relatively abstract forms, although certain details, such as Melkor's combat with the elven king, Fingolfin, in which he is wounded seven times, and the marriage of Melian the maia to King Thingol, and her bearing him a child, suggests that the Valar and Maiar are indeed capable of adopting physical forms.

The recently published *Morgoth's Ring* pronounces definitively on the subject. All the Valar and Maiar are indeed capable of donning physical bodies, but we read that :

Melkor incarnated himself (as Morgoth) permanently. He did this so as to control the *'hroa'*, the *'flesh'* or physical matter of Arda. He attempted to identify himself with it....thus, outside the Blessed Realm, all *'matter'* was likely to have a *'Melkor ingredient'*, and those whose bodies, nourished by the *hroa* of Arda, had as it were a tendency, small or great, towards Melkor.<sup>33a</sup>



The gnostic parallel of Satan as *rex mundi*, with dominion over the physical world through its intrinsic corruption, becomes immediately apparent, although 'Lord of the World' is a title Finrod emphatically denies is Melkor's in the *Athrabeth*.<sup>38b</sup> And so we are still left with the question, is physical matter to be regarded as evil? Tolkien's answer seems to be 'only potentially'. There is no dualist co-eternity of good and evil; the physical world was intended to be good, but we inhabit a fallen world: *Arda Marred*. Melkor has impregnated matter with his *mana*, and within the context of Tolkien's *legendarium*, this underpins the great problem for the Valar, and explains their long, apparently negligent inaction to protect the world of which they are the guardians. Sauron instilled much of his *mana* into a golden Ring, and it was enough to destroy that Ring to finally defeat him. But:

*Sauron's, relatively smaller, power was concentrated; Morgoth's vast power was disseminated. The whole of Middle-earth was Morgoth's Ring* <sup>39c</sup>

Thus Manwë knows that any overcome Morgoth must involve immense physical destruction, and his total destruction would necessitate the obliteration of the physical world itself. Tolkien even suggests that the 'Melkor ingredient' in gold, an element which is apparently particularly rich in this property, played a major part in Sauron's Ring-lore, he being able to awaken its evil potential. The implication is, however, that the evil in matter is dormant; intrinsic, yes, but latent until awoken by human cupidity, by possessiveness. What he seems to be implying is simply that the physical world is fallen along with us, and easily lends itself to our sins. The myth of the world as Morgoth's Ring is in effect a mythologization of St. Paul's warnings about the dangers of the world of the flesh, rather than the spirit, or *hró* and *fëa* as Tolkien calls them. I shall return to this point in the final chapter, where I shall relate it to the question of redemption.

The five Istari, or wizards, including Gandalf and Saruman, do indeed undergo a physical incarnation of a kind not usually adopted

by the the Valar and Maiar, in order to absolve the world of the evils of Sauron: the Valar 'sent members of their own high order, but clad in the bodies of men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears and weariness of earth'. Quite clearly Tolkien is here appropriating diluted aspects of Christian doctrine of incarnation, but there is no hint, as the Docetists believed, that taking on a physical body was in any way demeaning or humbling to a being of spiritual substance. What it does do is lay the incarnate being open to temptation, since he now partakes of 'the Melkor ingredient'.<sup>333</sup>

It must be stressed that physical matter is not intrinsically evil in Tolkien's world if we are to make sense of a curious pattern that recurs over and again throughout The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. Its form may crudely be stated thus: an initially good person grows preoccupied with material substance and the act of Making, which seems to instigate a moral degeneration that leads him into evil. Wherever this pattern occurs, one common factor can be identified; the figure of the Vala Aulë, the Maker of Things, invariably stands in the background. This smith-god, Tolkien's equivalent to the Greek Hephaestus, or more accurately, to the Anglo-Saxon Weyland or Norse Völundr, is ranked third in power among the Valar. 'His lordship is over all the substances of which Arda is made...his are the gems that lie deep in the earth and the gold that is fair in the hand, no less than the walls of the mountains and basins of the sea.'<sup>334</sup> In the beginning, we are told, Sauron was a maiar in the service of Aulë, from whom he derived his knowledge of ring-lore. The elves fall through one of their three Houses, that of the Noldor, who's prince, Feānor, makes the Silmarils and covets their possession. They take delight in craftsmanship and smithying; of all the Valar they are closest to Aulë, of whom it is said that 'the Noldor learned most of him, and he was ever their friend'.<sup>40</sup> In the Second Age, while some of the Noldor remain in exile in Middle Earth, it is they that Sauron comes to at Hollin, disguised as Anatar, the Lord of Gifts, and induces to make the Rings of Power. Saruman demonstrates the same fall from grace in The Lord of the Rings, and we find that, like Sauron, he originally served Aulë as a maia.

A fourth example of the pattern is the dwarves, the most ignoble

of the Free Peoples, obsesses with material wealth, which they take great pride in mining from the earth; they are the creatures of Aulë. He made the seven Fathers of the Dwarves in his smithy in his impatience for the awakening of the Children of Ilúvatar, to whom he might teach his crafts. Because this attempted act of Creation outside the Theme of Ilúvatar is born of love rather than pride, Ilúvatar forgives the repentant Aulë, and weaves the dwarves into the pattern of Creation through the Freedom of Ilúvatar; as the anguished smith raises his hammer to crush his as yet lifeless creations, the dwarves shrink back from the blow, given life by the compassionate Ilúvatar. But because Aulë had not conferred with his fellow Valar in their creation, the dwarves remain a flawed race, inheriting their maker's love of making but little else. This leads to monomaniacal obsessions with material possessions, such as Thorin's lust for the Arkenstone of his fathers that leads to the Quest of Erebor in The Hobbit. The dwarvish race is finally redeemed, however, by the awakening of spirituality in the person of Gimli, who, on departing from Lothlórien asks as a parting gift only a single strand of Galadriel's hair, which *"surpasses the gold of the earth as the stars surpass the gems of the mine"*. Granted three strands, he vows to *"set it in imperishable crystal to be an heirloom of [his] house, and a pledge of good will between the Mountain and the Wood until the end of days."*<sup>41</sup> At this, Galadriel tells him that *"Your hands shall flow with gold, yet over you gold shall have no dominion,"* for he has transcended the materialism of his own racial nature.

A superficial reading of Tolkien's message in all of these examples, but particularly that of the dwarves, may suggest that he is saying no more than though material substance in itself is not evil, a preoccupation with it corrupts and turns one away from spiritual truths. If this were so, our exercise in exposing the existential policy of his fiction would have proved disappointing, for this message is no more sophisticated than that of the pious doer of good works who sadly shakes his head at slum dwellings owned by fat capitalists. But he is saying more than this; he is expressing a specific phenomenology of evil, and to identify it we must go back to the very beginning of Time, to the creation of the Ainur.



We must ask whether the pattern of corruption, with the common denominator of the Vala Aulë, as outlined above, is deliberate, or merely coincidental, and to answer that, we must ask whether it can be applied to the greatest of Tolkien's fallen creatures: has Melkor any connection with Aulë? Certainly he was never in his service, as were the above examples, but in the *Valaquenta* we read that :

*Melkor was jealous of him, for Aulë was most like himself in thought and in powers; and there was long strife between them, in which Melkor ever marred or undid the works of Aulë, and Aulë grew weary in repairing the tumults and disorders of Melkor. Both, also, desired to make things of their own that should be new and unthought of by others, and delighted in the praise of their skill. But Aulë remained faithful to Eru, and submitted all that he did to his will; and he did not envy the works of others, but sought and gave council. <sup>42</sup>*

In other words, Aulë, with the exception of his one transgression with the dwarves, was the archetypal Sub-creator, working always within the divine will. Ilúvatar is the greatest maker of all, indeed the only Maker, since all other creative acts are in fact sub-creative, deriving from his cosmogony. The Ainur were his first creations, the 'offspring of his thoughts', which is to say, they are aspects of the mind of the Creator:

*Each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. <sup>43</sup>*

Existentially Aulë can be seen to represent the Skill of Ilúvatar, and a similar schematization can be made through the rest of the Valar: Manwë is his Majesty, Varda his Inspiration, Ulmo his Understanding, Tulkas his Strength, Námo his Knowledge, Irmo his Imagination, Vairë his Memory, Nienna his Compassion, and so on. Melkor, the angel destined to fall, had 'been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his

brethren.' What he represents is the Pride of Ilúvatar, or rather the decayed pride, which on becoming overweening loses touch with the more stable aspects of the mind. He has 'a share in all the gifts of his brethren' because he was engendered by the creation of his brethren. He is the self-satisfaction of the Creator that is hinted at in Genesis I:x; *And God saw that it was good.*

But is this not to imply that Melkor is simply the evil aspect of Ilúvatar, and that the latter is not therefore a perfect being? The answer is no, for two reasons. the first is that, whatever the aetiology of himself and his brethren, Melkor qua Melkor is an autonomous consciousness, a sentient being with free will. At the time of his creation he is closer to perfection than any of his brethren; there can have been nothing corrupt about the Creator's pride in his handiwork. *"The delight and pride of Aulë is in the deed of making, and in the thing made, and neither in possession nor in his own mastery",* we are told and the distinction with Melkor is important. There is nothing wrong with pride in the act of making, but when pride continues after the creative act, transferring itself to the thing made, it becomes something else; it becomes Possessiveness, the great evil that for Tolkien is synonymous with Man's Fallen condition. Melkor is therefore created a near perfect being, but independently of his creator turns into something quite different. His lust is to possess; he desires to create independently of Ilúvatar for he knows that anything that he might sub-create 'hath its uttermost source' in Ilúvatar and can never be possessed by him. The evil of Melkor is a result of Ilúvatar's creation, but is no more part of Ilúvatar than is the spark which results from hitting a piece of metal with a hammer - one would not wish to claim that the spark comes 'out of' either the hammer or the metal - but if the spark land among dry sawdust and takes hold, a fire will result that is something quite other than the spark, though its origin remains the same.

Here then is Tolkien's doctrine of evil. It is a species of privation theory, certainly, since free will is necessary for the decay of Pride into Possessiveness, thereby protecting the perfect Creator. The peculiarly Tolkienian aspect is that which ties the

process to creativity; we might recall Tolkien's words quoted at the beginning of this study: *"the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of Creation to making and Sub-Creating."* This overriding interest, it will be seen, is the existential formula that lies behind the mythologization of other religious issues, the most closely related being that of Free Will.

### Free Will and the Concept of Doom

If the Music of the Ainur, played out upon Ilúvatar's theme, is the blueprint for the whole of Creation from beginning to end, what room is left for the inhabitants of Middle-earth for free will? For the Creator to state that 'no theme shall be played that hath not its uttermost source in me' is, at first sight, to establish a rigidly determinist framework for the ensuing mythology. But as we have seen, to rule out a creaturely capacity for free will is to implicate the deity in the evil excesses of Melkor and his followers.

There is a strong suggestion of fatalism about The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. The Elves know that whatever the outcome of the War of the Ring, their time in Middle-earth is passing, and the coming Fourth Age shall be the Age of Men. They sense that, whatever twists and turns history might take, events will, ultimately tend towards the same end: that they must pass over the sea or dwindle. But there is a less rigorous way of viewing a deterministic metaphysic, and the name that Gandalf gives to it is Providence - a benign guiding will, shaping events around the free choices made by individuals.

The classic free will response to the problem of evil is that expounded by Dr Pangloss: that God has created the best of all possible worlds, and that there is a greater goodness in a creature freely choosing the good than in an automaton divinely pre-programmed to always choose the good. Unfortunately the freedom to choose goodness must also involve an equal freedom to choose ill.



Thus free will is an integral component of any teleological privation theory of evil. There is some evidence of this concept in Tolkien's fiction. The Ring's hold on Bilbo, for example, is slack enough not to have done him any permanent damage because he began his possession of it with an act of charity; he had a choice of slaying Gollum to effect his escape, or of sparing him, and through pity he chose the latter course. Pity is an indication of creaturely status; the ability to look at a fellow creature and say 'There, but for the grace of God, go I' is a sign of an individual's acceptance of his place within the Music of Ilúvatar. It is an emotion antithetical to the great Tolkienian sin of possessiveness. But the waters of this apparent free choice are muddled when we reflect that this act of pity spared Gollum to be taken up and worked into the great pattern of fate. Gandalf tells Frodo at the beginning of the Trilogy that Gollum

*is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many - your not least.<sup>44</sup>*

As Gandalf predicts it is Gollum's continued existence that enables the Quest to be successfully completed. Frodo's will, on the brink of Mount Doom is finally overwhelmed by the Ring and he refuses to complete his mission:

*'I have come,' he said. 'But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine.'<sup>45</sup>*

There is a terrible irony in the words *choose* and *will*; Frodo, his actions absolutely determined by the Ring, is bereft of all choice but no longer realises it. His salvation, and the West's, is Gollum, who bites off Frodo's ring finger<sup>46</sup> and falls into the Cracks of Doom clutching the Precious.

Yet Gandalf, in the above quoted passage, in speaking of Bilbo's pity as though it were a result of free will, strongly implies a shaping Providence. It might be argued that prophecy, if it proves

true, is an indication of a determinist universe. But it is perfectly possible to construct a metaphysic in which free will and determinism have their respective places. Frodo prophetically says to Gollum "*If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom*", though this is a prophecy of a different order from Gandalf's. Gandalf predicts what will, and does happen, whereas Frodo's words to Gollum have the form 'if...then...', i.e. with the implication that 'if not...then not...' In other words, a free choice is permitted, but the results of that choice will determine a specific outcome. It is also worth noting that Frodo does not say "*I [i.e. the Master of the Precious] shall cast you into the Fire of Doom*", nor that Gollum would be compelled to cast himself in, but that "*you shall be cast yourself*", a slightly awkwardly emphatic phrasing that seems to shift the subject of the action to some anonymous agency.

Tolkien's beloved Anglo-Saxon civilization evolved the concept of *wyrd*, usually misleadingly translated as 'fate', but in fact signifying a providential disposition which can in fact be altered, or refused, by the exercise of free-will. Moral responsibility, of course, must then rest with the individual, for any consequences resulting from refusing one's *wyrd*. The word, incidently, is etymologically identical with 'wierd', reminding us of the fateful dilemma faced by Macbeth, when confronted with the the prophecies of the three Wierd Sisters on the blasted heath. If the witches are deemed to represent the forces of evil, a thesis can easily be constructed that their suggestions to the ambitious and weak-willed Macbeth were sufficient to turn him aside from his noble *wyrd*, and culpably aim for the crown as the result of the exercise of his free will. It seems entirely possible that when Tolkien speaks of 'doom', he means something closely akin to *wyrd*.

The providence at which Gandalf hints can not be the result of action on the part of Manwë, since the Valar have restricted their aid to Middle-earth to the sending of the five Istari; it can only be the will of Eru, and it is worth considering once more his words to Melkor:

*'nor can any alter the Music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful.'*

Sauron's creation of the Ring, an act of calculated possessiveness and thereby in despite of the Music, must ultimately be brought to an end by the will of Eru-Ilúvatar. But that is not to say that that end should not come about by a concatenation of free decisions. All that Providence need do is is redeploy individuals, chessman-like, after every free decision is made, in the hope that the end will be reached by the shortest route. There are two ways of regarding the climax of the quest; either Gollum chose freely to throw off his Sméagol persona and make a final frantic bid for the Ring, or else Gollum had, by that stage, lost the last of himself to the possession of the Ring, his actions being entirely determined by the corrupting trinket of the Enemy, in which case Sauron was hoist with his own petard. Had Gollum not acted as he did at the Cracks of Doom, Ilúvatar might have found some other way to bring about the Ring's destruction, however long it might have taken. It might well have involved the self-sacrifice of Samwise, who has already shown himself ready to die for his Master's well-being and for the good of the Quest. We recall his words in Cirith Ungol, when he takes the Ring from Frodo's apparently lifeless body: *"The Council gave him companions, so that the errand should not fail. And you are the last of all the Company. The errand must not fail."*<sup>47</sup> Had Gollum been slain, by Bilbo, Faramir or Sam, as he came close to being at various points, we can see that in Sam's devotion and courage providence has at least one fall-back position with which to turn events to the good at Mt Doom, and there are, as any author knows, many other possibilities.

It is within the context of the free-will question that a word should be said about the moral status of the orcs. Tolkien adopts his pseudo-editorial persona to leave the origin of this corrupt race open to doubt, reporting two main traditions, one that they were bred from captured and tortured elves, and the other from men, even advancing a theory that the earliest orcs may have been maiar, their



*'nor can any alter the Music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful.'*

Sauron's creation of the Ring, an act of calculated possessiveness and thereby in despite of the Music, must ultimately be brought to an end by the will of Eru-Ilúvatar. But that is not to say that that end should not come about by a concatenation of free decisions. All that Providence need do is is redeploy individuals, chessman-like, after every free decision is made, in the hope that the end will be reached by the shortest route. There are two ways of regarding the climax of the quest; either Gollum chose freely to throw off his Sméagol persona and make a final frantic bid for the Ring, or else Gollum had, by that stage, lost the last of himself to the possession of the Ring, his actions being entirely determined by the corrupting trinket of the Enemy, in which case Sauron was hoist with his own petard. Had Gollum not acted as he did at the Cracks of Doom, Ilúvatar might have found some other way to bring about the Ring's destruction, however long it might have taken. It might well have involved the self-sacrifice of Samwise, who has already shown himself ready to die for his Master's well-being and for the good of the Quest. We recall his words in Cirith Ungol, when he takes the Ring from Frodo's apparently lifeless body: *"The Council gave him companions, so that the errand should not fail. And you are the last of all the Company. The errand must not fail."*<sup>47</sup> Had Gollum been slain, by Bilbo, Faramir or Sam, as he came close to being at various points, we can see that in Sam's devotion and courage providence has at least one fall-back position with which to turn events to the good at Mt Doom, and there are, as any author knows, many other possibilities.

It is within the context of the free-will question that a word should be said about the moral status of the orcs. Tolkien adopts his pseudo-editorial persona to leave the origin of this corrupt race open to doubt, reporting two main traditions, one that they were bred from captured and tortured elves, and the other from men, even advancing a theory that the earliest orcs may have been maiar, their

offspring being prone to genetic degeneration. What is certain is that they first appear in the Histories at about the same time as the first men reached the Western shore of Middle-earth and made contact with the elves, and that they make up a substantial part of Melkor's armies. Most 'traditions' agree that Melkor bred this malicious race, and Frodo expresses the general opinion that evil is incapable of genuine creativity (since it rejects the sub-creative constraints) but can only corrupt and marr. Tolkien goes further:

*But if [Melkor] had indeed tried to make creatures of his own, in mockery of the Incarnates, he would, like Aulë, only have succeeded in producing puppets: his creatures would have acted only while the attention of his will was upon them, and they would have shown no reluctance to execute any of his commands, even if it were to destroy themselves.<sup>47a</sup>*

Such creatures would be, in elvish terms, all *hröa*, without any *fëa*, bodies of flesh without minds. "But the Orcs," says Tolkien, "were not of this kind."

*They were certainly dominated by their Master, but his dominion was by fear, and they were aware of this fear and hated him. They were indeed so corrupted that they were pitiless, and there was no cruelty or wickedness that they would not commit; but this was the corruption of independent wills, and they took pleasure in their deeds.<sup>47b</sup>*

Here then is a clear statement, taken from a recently published essay, that even orcs are creatures of free will; in that, and only that circumstance, their evil resides. We may safely assume then, that the races Tolkien designates as 'the Free Peoples' also share this quality. Indeed, we have known since *The Silmarillion* that the soul of an elf slain in battle or by accident returns to the Halls of Mandos in Aman where it remains until the world's end, but we now learn that the elf has a choice: to be re-incarnated, clothed by the grace of Ilúvatar in another *hröa*, which may or may not be identical

to his former body, or to spend the rest of the duration of Arda in Mandos' Halls in the disembodied *fëar* state. If the former is chosen, he may wander freely about the Undying Lands, and the only thing that prevents him returning to Middle-earth is the logistical difficulty of the physical journey.<sup>47c</sup> The Valar are specifically forbidden to exert power over the Children of Ilúvatar, which is to say, to curtail their free will.

In a passage quoted in the previous section, Tolkien demythologises his own fiction by explaining that Men and Elves are two aspects of what he calls 'the humane'. Against this existential context we might consider the gifts of Ilúvatar to Men. The first is the gift of Death, dreaded by men only because of the lies of Melkor, yet envied by the world-bound elves.<sup>47d</sup> But of more immediate interest to us is the second gift; unlike the Elves, whose actions are broadly determined by the Music, Men are permitted the freedom to act outside the Music. The Elves are popularly regarded as 'embalmers', dedicated to preserving their surroundings against change of any sort, which is the dominant characteristic trait of their culture. They too, then, are slaves to a kind of possessiveness, attempting to shape their environment to their own person, rather than adapting themselves to their environment. It is this static culture that robs them of their freedom and determines their actions. Feānor's terrible Oath, which condemns him and his sons to a life of warring with Melkor, bringing about them the determinist instrument of a curse, is a result of his possessiveness for the silmarils. Men on the other hand are much freer to choose between good and evil, which is Tolkien's rendering of the human capacity for responsible action, which entails a certain selfless adaptability. Frodo could have been freed from the burden of responsibility for the Ring simply by remaining silent at the Council of Elrond, but instead makes a free decision: *'I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way.'* Of course much of the time Men choose for the worse. Tolkien the great conservationist is hardly condemning the possessiveness of the Elves, and nor is he over-estimating Man's capacity to do good. In giving his two kindreds differing degrees of metaphysical freedom, he



is illustrating what he sees as the dual nature of human freedom in a fallen world.

### The Metaphysics of Power

In one of his reviews of *The Lord of the Rings*, W.H.Auden comments that "our historical experience tells us that physical power, and to a large extent, mental power, are morally neutral and effectively real".<sup>48</sup> The morality of the exercise of power is entirely determined by the nature of the Authority by which that power is wielded. Clearly the exercise of power without authority is immoral, and has been referred to by generations of political historians and theologians alike as tyranny. But it remains to be asked whether power wielded by a legitimate authority can ever be misused, or whether perhaps the misuse of power automatically invalidates its authority.

Before referring these questions to Tolkien's thought, two kinds of authority must be distinguished. The first is that which society accords to its ruler or government, to regulate its daily functions on its behalf; in effect, it is the consensus authority of Rousseau's Social Contract. But for all the glorious foundations of democracy in Fifth Century B.C. Athens, the principle is a comparatively modern one, alien to the medieval mind which sought a metaphysical rather than sociological authority to legitimate its monarchs. In this scheme of things, the nobility exercised power over the peasantry, but were themselves subject to the power of the king. The king, of course, was held to rule by divine right, himself subject only to the power of Christ, the King of Heaven. This latter scheme is the one Tolkien makes most use of, but typically the whole issue of power and authority is reducible to a question of sub-creation and possession.

The first of his principles seems to be that a creator possesses the authority to exercise power over his creation. The notion of sub-creation theoretically guarantees against an abuse of such power, since every sub-creator, in agreeing to work within the confines of the Will of Ilúvatar, is himself ultimately subject to the power of

the wholly good God. According to Tolkien's poetic ontology, God is the source of ultimate Authority because he is The Author: "*the Writer of the Story, (by which I do not mean myself)*", as he puts it.<sup>49</sup> But the would-be maker who refuses to be bound by the principles of sub-creation, who rejects his creaturely status, is the man who acts without authority. Not being able to truly make, he can only seek to imprison aspects of the rest of creation - his fellow men, nature, property - and bend it to his will. Such coercion without authority is the sin of possessiveness, and as such is an act of evil. For though subject to the power of God, his free will, as we have seen, enables him to reject God's Authority, and, as the theodicean problem makes plain, it is not the way of God to exercise his power to restore that authority.

It might be observed that the medieval political notion of authority outlined above has more than a superficial resemblance to Tolkien's version, since the principle of *poesis*, or Making, is involved to some degree. A prince may create the baronies and earldoms of his nobles, and has therefore the authority to exercise power over them. On the other hand, he would possess no authority to exert power over his king, from whose hands he theoretically receives his principedom, and any such attempt would be accounted an act of rebellion and war.

In existential terms, then, what Tolkien appears to be saying is that it is the sin of possessiveness that lies at the root of tyranny, and that legitimate power, a positive force for the preservation of social harmony and security, can only be wielded by those free of possessiveness, those who, in St Paul's words, do not live "the life of the flesh". Such is exemplified by the wielders of the Three Elven Rings. Elrond uses the power of Vilya the Blue Ring to preserve an harmonic social order at Rivendell; his authority to do so is underscored by the position he adopts as host to all weary travellers who come to the Last Homely House east of the Sea. His exercise of power is tempered with his willingness to serve others. Galadriel similarly preserves the wonderland of Lothlórien with the power of the Ring of Water, Nenya. She bears no formal title other than the Lady of the Golden Wood, and is not, as some commentators

have presumed, a queen. Lórien was once ruled over by a monarch, Amroth, but since his loss, the Galadhrim have voluntarily submitted themselves to the lordship of Celeborn, with Galadriel as his consort. Her political position is primarily secured, not by the power of her Ring, which she uses only to protect their woodland society from the encroaching Shadow, but by the love the Galadhrim have for her wisdom and humanity.

The last Ring, Narya, of Fire, is secretly carried by Gandalf, who uses it to help inspire others to working to their own defence of their values and society; his legitimate ownership is guaranteed by his steadfast adherence to the prohibition laid upon the Istari at the start of their mission, that they should not seek to wield power or coercion over the Free Peoples. Saruman's fall consists in his failure to do just this. Working on the manuscript of The Lord of the Rings during the 1930s and '40s, watching the rapacious territorial ambitions of Hitler and Mussolini, these conclusions must have held great force for Tolkien.

The Valar themselves are in one text<sup>49\*</sup> accused of a kind of possessiveness in their act of raising the Pelóri Mountains to act as a bulwark against the ravages of Melkor: *"it is possible to view this as, if not an actually bad action, then at least a mistaken one,"* Tolkien comments. *"The Hiding of Valinor came near to countering Morgoth's possessiveness by a rival possessiveness, setting up a private domain of light and bliss against one of darkness and domination."* Their avowed intention in doing so was to preserve the innocence of the elves, but it is found that such an action is doomed to failure if the elven free will is to be left intact. The Valar demonstrate their fidelity to Eru by not attempting to coerce the Noldor, when the latter insist on returning to Middle-earth in pursuit of Melkor. The Doom of Mandos is not a curse, but a foretelling of what will befall the Noldor if they persist in their intention to leave Aman whilst in the grip of the possessive urge to recover the silmarils. Thus the Valar's one apparent act of possessiveness fails because of their refusal to tyrannize the elves: like the bearers of the Three, they demonstrate their fitness to wield power by operating within the strictures laid down by a higher



authority.

The great emblem of power in Tolkien's work is of course the One Ring, the embodiment of Sauron's malevolent will. Unable to create in his own right, he has used it, and hopes to use it again, to possess the whole of Middle-earth and the minds of its free peoples. It is more than just a symbol of possessiveness; its very essence consists of the lure to coerce others to the bearer's will. Ultimately it possesses its bearer. Gollum has lost most of his will to the power of the Ring, resulting in the extraordinary bifurcation of his personality. He spends much of his time in arguing with himself, a dialogue between two clearly defined personae, named by Frodo 'Sméagol' and 'Gollum', and less charitably by Sam, 'Slinker' and 'Stinker'. He is, in fact, an embodiment of the existential dialectic between the two aspects of human nature: the humbler, creaturely aspect, ready to acknowledge and perhaps even to love 'the Master', and the possessive, corrupt aspect, desiring first to possess the Ring to achieve the power of possessing others, and then degenerating to the desire to possess the Ring for the mere sake of the possession of it in itself. The truth of the matter is, as Tolkien has implied in *On Fairy Stories*, our possessions have a tendency to possess us. When this occurs, our freedom is sacrificed to our lusts.

One of the most curious incidents relating to the provenance of power in *The Lord of the Rings* occurs during the hobbits' stay in the house of Tom Bombadil.

*'Show me the precious Ring!' [Tom] said...and Frodo, to his own astonishment, drew out the chain from his pocket, and unfastening the Ring handed it at once to Tom.*

*It seemed to grow larger as it lay for a moment in his big brown-skinned hand. Then suddenly he put it to his eye and laughed. For a second the hobbits had a vision, both comical and alarming, of his bright blue eye gleaming through a circle of gold. Then Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the light. For a moment the hobbits noticed nothing strange about this. Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing. 50*

Tom Bombadil, alone of all the inhabitants of Middle-earth described in the books, seems to be immune to the power of the Ring. In order to understand the existential comment Tolkien is making through Tom on the nature of power, I must first say something of the confusion and debate his character has occasioned among critics. It is necessary to decide what kind of a creature Tom is, if we are to draw any conclusions about the nature of power and his relations to it. In narrative terms the Bombadil episodes, comprising chapters 6, 7, and 8 of The Fellowship of the Ring, are something of an irrelevant intrusion; they neither arise from, nor contribute to the organic development of the plot. Significantly almost all adaptations of the trilogy to other media, even Brian Sibley's celebrated B.B.C. Radio production, elect to omit these episodes in their entirety. Tolkien himself is on record as saying he only included these chapters because he felt the need for the hobbits to have some sort of adventure between leaving the Shire and arriving at the Prancing Pony. What is more, many critics do not hesitate to label the character of Tom an artistic failure. His constant bursts of nonsense verse, presumably calculated to suggest breezy good humour have been dismissed as 'ear-thumpingly dull'. However, while acknowledging that Bombadil is "*not an important person - to the narrative*", Tolkien nevertheless insists that ;

*he represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyse the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in if he did not have some kind of function.<sup>31</sup>*

It is remarkable enough in itself that Tolkien, who expended huge amounts of time and energy working to make his Secondary world comprehensive and cohesive, was prepared to take such a *laissez-faire* attitude to the character of Bombadil, and this in itself has goaded the critic to look more closely at this issue. The great mystery is, of course, who, or what, is Tom Bombadil? The hobbits take him for a man, though slightly smaller in stature, and clearly he

is neither elf, dwarf, hobbit or ent, but it soon emerges that if he is human, he is not mortal. He himself tells the hobbits:

*'Eldest, that's what I am...Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the Little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the elves passes westwards, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the Dark under the stars when it was fearless - before the Dark Lord came from the Outside.'*<sup>51</sup>

To the elves Tom is known as Iarwain Ben-adar, which means 'Oldest and Fatherless'. Gandalf says of him that once his realm was a wide one, but now he has contracted his boundaries to a small area on the edge of the Old Forest. Most provocative of all are the replies of Tom's wife, Goldberry, to Frodo's question 'Who is Tom Bombadil?': 'He is', and 'He is, as you have seen him'. This response, with its Mosaic echoes of 'I am that I am', have provoked the conviction among many that he is an incarnation of God-Ilúvatar himself. Tolkien has ruled out this hypothesis, indicating that Goldberry's replies are references to naming and language; in effect, Tom's language is Adamic, hence his ability to exert power over Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight with mere words. And Tom it is who gives names to the hobbits' ponies; names to which they respond ever after.

Other popular suggestions as to his nature include 'a nature deity *par excellence*',<sup>52</sup> a diminished nature spirit of the type of Pan, or Puck,<sup>53</sup> and 'a *lusus naturae*, a one-member category'.<sup>54</sup> One of the strongest suggestions would seem to be that Tom is a Maia, an hypothesis urged by Robert Forster in his Complete Guide to Middle-earth. Gene Hargrove seeks to counter this suggestion by pointing out that 'there is no Maia in The Silmarillion who matches Tom's general character', but completely overlooks the fact that a great many maiar entered Arda in the service of the Valar, that 'their number is not known to the Elves' and only the most important are described in the *Valaquenta*. Alatar and Palando are not mentioned in



The Silmarillion, yet maiar they most certainly were.<sup>55</sup> If Tom is a maiar, it is most likely that he once belonged to the train of either Yavanna, the nature goddess, or Oromë, the divine forester, whose surname Aldarion means 'lover of trees'. Hargrove's paper, Who is Tom Bombadil?<sup>56</sup> presents a useful overview of the discussion, but regrettably concludes with the absurd suggestion that Bombadil and Goldberry are in fact the Valar Aulë and Yavanna holidaying for a couple of millennia in the Old Forest. Arguments against this thesis can be briefly states thus:

- 1] Tolkien specifically tells us that, with the exception of the Army of the West at the end of the First Age, the only Vala who still comes to Middle Earth after the awakening of Men is Ulmo.
- 2] Aulë is concerned with dead matter such as stones and minerals, while Tom's love is for growing things, for *kelvar* and *olvar*, trees and animals, which are the province of Aulë's wife, Yavanna, and, as the story of his creation of the dwarves indicates, are not things with which he has a natural sympathy.
- 3] Similarly, Goldberry, the River Woman's daughter, is in effect a water spirit, which is at odds with Yavanna's earthy nature.
- 4] Hargrove's suggestion that Aulë's reason for being in the Old Forest is to study hobbits is tenuous; I cannot think of a race less likely to interest the great Technician than that of the rural, nature-loving, machine-hating Halflings.

I find it more likely that Tolkien intended Goldberry as second-generation maiar. If, as I suspect Hargrove would desire, a name must be provided for her parents, I think we might reasonably identify the River Woman with Uinen, 'the Lady of the Seas, whose hair is spread through all the waters under the sky'<sup>57</sup>, and her spouse, the storm maiar, Ossë. In addition, The Book of Lost Tales mentions "the Oarni, the Falmaríni and the long-tressed Wingildi"<sup>57a</sup>, who are "spirits of the foam and surf of ocean", and the first of which are identified as 'mermaids' and 'seamaids' of whom Eärendil was beloved.<sup>57b</sup> Hargrove need have no concern that Goldberry is a *lusus naturae*.

Bombadil however is another matter. If his claim to have been present 'before the rivers and trees...before the Dark Lord came from Outside' is true then he seems to imply he was present from the moment of the world's creation, from the point of Ilúvatar's fiat and before the Valar themselves entered the world. I consider the most convincing argument to be that advances by Timothy R. O'Neill, who believes Bombadil represents an Adamic blueprint for mankind.<sup>59</sup> He is the actualisation of the 'Secret Theme' of Ilúvatar, the archetype of the Children of Ilúvatar that was hidden from the Ainur. In support of this we may recall the Adamic nature of his language - *'I know the the tune for him. Old grey Willow Man! ...I'll sing his roots off. I'll sing a wind up and blow leaf and branch away. Old Man Willow!'*<sup>60</sup> - and that, like Adam, Tom had no father. Glorfindel prophesies that Tom will succumb last to the Shadow, even as he was first. He is in fact *'conceived as both alpha and omega of Man's development, he also represents a sort of innate, predestined goal - the personification, if you will, of the genetic potential, of Self-actualisation'*.<sup>60</sup>

This being the case, Tom is the direct creation of Ilúvatar, i.e. not brought into being by any intermediate, demiurgic agency, and as such must be expected to exhibit a high degree of perfection. Tom simply lacks any trace of possessiveness. When, at the Council of Elrond, it is suggested that the Ring be placed in Tom's safe keeping, Gandalf says that Tom would simply forget he had the Ring, or even throw it away. He would accept it unwillingly, *'only if all the Free Peoples of the world begged him to do so, but he would not understand the need...Such things have no hold on his mind'*<sup>61</sup> since the concept of a possession is itself alien to the nature-dwelling Bombadil. Frodo evidently senses this quality in him, since, to his surprise, he hands the Ring to him without the slightest hesitation, whereas in Chapter Two he had felt reluctance to yield it to Gandalf, whom he has known and trusted for many years. In discussing Bombadil, Tolkien has the following to say:

*The story is cast in terms of a good side and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderate*

*freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object save mere power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control. But if you have, as it were, taken 'a vow of poverty', renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless<sup>62</sup>*

It now becomes clear why the Ring has no effect on Tom. It operates upon its bearer by drawing out his possessive tendencies and inflating them to the degree that he becomes so enslaved by his desire that he becomes the possession of the Ring; it can find nothing on which to work in Bombadil's character.

Thus this apparent digression on the nature of Bombadil has highlighted the connection between power and possessiveness. Legitimate power can only be wielded by an individual who is able to hold his desire to 'appropriate'<sup>63</sup> in check; individuals such as the bearers of the Three Elven Rings. Bombadil, however, illustrates the principle taken to its logical conclusion, that an individual devoid of all possessive tendencies, a type perhaps exemplified in our Primary world by someone like St Francis, will inevitably eschew power itself. Tolkien is therefore suggesting that the possession of power contains within it the seeds of corruption on its own terms, echoing Lord Acton, and it is the ethical responsibility of those with whom power resides to ensure that they serve those over whom they have power, rather than coercing them to their own service.

### Temptation and Sacrifice

The theological themes of evil, free will, power and authority all, as we have seen, resolve themselves for Tolkien into a question of possessiveness. It emerges from our discussion as the dominant, perhaps we might go so far as to say, the characteristic symptom of



the lapsarian condition. It should be stressed that Tolkien does not just mean possessiveness for material wealth or goods, but beyond that, a condition of perception: he describes Fallen Man's perception of his world as 'trite':

*This triteness is really a penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite...are the things we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we have laid hands on them, and locked them in our horde, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. 64*

His point echoes St Paul's distinction between 'living in the world' rather than 'in the spirit'.

I wish now briefly to consider the themes of temptation and sacrifice, in both of which the concept of possessiveness will be readily seen to be inherent in one capacity or other. I have chosen to treat the two themes side by side since they are, to some extent, opposite sides of the same coin; to resist temptation, is to renounce something for which a strong desire exists: it is, therefore, an act of sacrifice.

The Ring, as emblem of possessiveness, as a means to great power, is appropriately the chief object of temptation in The Lord of the Rings, and that the theme of temptation was a central one for Tolkien is born out by the list of characters forced to wrestle with their desires to possess and/or use it: Bilbo, Frodo, Gandalf, Galadriel, Boromir, Gollum, Faramir and Sam. Gandalf is probably the most self-possessed in his rejection of temptation, emphatically refusing Frodo's suggestion that he should assume guardianship of the Ring. He knows better than any the true nature of the thing and has made a firm decision not to even contemplate using it. At an earlier stage, when he merely suspects that Bilbo's ring might be the One Ring, he takes the precaution of refusing to touch it, instructing the departing Bilbo to leave it on the mantelpiece for Frodo to find. Tolkien leaves us in no doubt that susceptibility to temptation is

very much part of the Istari's incarnational experience, assuring us that they all faced

*the possibility of 'fall', of sin, if you will. The chief form this would take with them would be impatience, leading to a desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means.* 65

Gandalf is indeed prone to impatience, particularly with the foolishness of Peregrin Took who, until his arrival at Minas Tirith, persistently fails to realise the magnitude of what is at stake. It is in the context of this aspect of Gandalf's character, deeply committed to opposing the power of Sauron, that the full force of the temptation to use the Ring must be measured, and indeed the strength of his will in refusing to even imagine the possibility.

Galadriel's wisdom and resolution are almost as great as Gandalf's, but unlike him, when Frodo offers to give her the Ring, she allows herself the luxury of a little temptation before finally rejecting it. That is to say, she permits herself to contemplate a future in which the One Ring is on her hand. She admits that, confronted with either the fading or the destruction of all she has laboured to create in Lothlórien, *"my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands"*. Freely offered the Ring, she lets her imagination contemplate the consequences of accepting it:

*'In place of a Dark Lord you would set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!'* 66

Despite Tolkien's excess of upper-case capitals and exclamation marks, this passage is an highly effective one in its dramatic

context, as Galadriel is demonstrating the inflationary influence on the personality that Gandalf and Elrond have described the Ring as having. It is a chilling scene, not only because of what amounts to a false peripeteia in the narrative, wherein the reader is suddenly made to fear Galadriel as a danger to Frodo, but also because of her words which contain a sickening inevitability. The possessor of the Ring may start out with lofty ideals, though all will eventually be eaten away. If indeed Galadriel were not to be dark, then we know that her light would be blinding and unbearable, while the phrase "all shall love me and despair", with its inherent emotional contradiction, recalls *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and classical figures such as *Circe* and *Medea*. She seems to exult in the sort of beauty which could bring nothing but misery to her subjects. She goes one stage further than uttering these words, by using her own ring, *Nenya*, to create a visual illusion of just such a terrible queen as she has described, before letting the light fade and returning to her accustomed, benign self. She makes an implicit link between the resisting of temptation and identity with the true self, in her words "I pass the test...I will diminish and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (my emphasis), which seems to imply that succumbing to the lure of an object outside the self - a yielding to possessiveness and subsequent possession - would distort the true nature of the individual.

Faramir is Gandalf's pupil, and like his master, makes a resolute decision not to even contemplate the possibility of wielding the Ring, claiming that he would not touch it if he found it lying by the roadside. His brother Boromir has not his sense of humility. But he is in no sense an evil man, his motives are beyond reproach. His lust to possess the Ring arises purely out of his desire to protect his people from the coming onslaught of Sauron's armies, but his honourable intentions are corrupted by the Ring's constant proximity. Boromir, like his father, is a proud man, and it is pride that leads him to reject every warning he has been given about the Ring; on Amon Hen he yields to temptation and tries to take the Ring from Frodo by force. In escaping, Frodo removes the Ring from Boromir's proximity and he returns to his senses almost immediately, repenting what he has done. But this is not to say that the Ring somehow



casts a spell over people, forcing them to act out of character. On the contrary, the Ring, which Shippey has called 'a psychic amplifier'<sup>67</sup> is only able to inflate traits already present in the subject's psychological make-up. Boromir, even though under undue pressure, remains morally responsible for his aberration, and there is a strong implication in Tolkien's text that he must atone for his sin. He does so by an act of sacrifice: the sacrifice of his own life in an attempt to save Merry and Pippin from the Isengard orcs. This atonement is followed by an extraordinary catholic death scene, in which Boromir confesses his sin to Aragorn (as priest-king?), and receives absolution in return:

*'Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.'*

*'No!' said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. 'You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!...'*

68

Sacrifice, as renunciation, a voluntary giving up of a valued object is, within the context of Tolkien's moral thinking, the antithesis of possessiveness, and as such we may be justified in viewing it as an outward sign of the operation of grace. Certainly Boromir dies in a state of Grace, if that concept has any meaning in Middle-earth, and Gandalf's comment that Elrond's decision to allow Merry and Pippin to make up the numbers of the Fellowship was providential for Boromir's sake, allowing him the opportunity to redeem himself in death, suggests that it does. The important point behind sacrifice is that the object given up should be of considerable value to the subject. In the ancient world sacrifices were assumed to have a propitiatory value, given as gifts, or bribes, to a deity, and it is significant that the objects sacrificed - rams, bullocks, lambs &c. - were of considerable economic viability. The poor were permitted to purchase and offer chickens and pigeons, which, in terms of their respective income, were as significant an offering as a rich man's bullock. No sacrifice is made if the object given up is of no value to the giver - a fairly obvious point, but one worth stressing since

it is this characteristic that has carried over into the more contemporary concept of sacrifice. What we now understand by the term is an internalized movement of renunciation, intended to work some psychological change in the subject, rather than influencing an external deity, but the rule still appertains that the object sacrificed must be of some value. Bilbo made no sacrifice in giving up Bag End and all his possessions to Frodo, since it felt like the right thing for him to do, (although giving up the Ring was a slightly different matter). However, Frodo's giving up the same property eighteen years later to carry the Ring to Rivendell and beyond amounts to a real sacrifice. He desires nothing more than to remain at Bag End for the rest of his days, living in peace and quiet, but gives it up for the greater good of the Shire. His love for the Shire is intensified by his sacrificial act by which his desire to possess his environment is overcome.

The ultimate form of sacrifice is of course self-sacrifice; the total acceptance of one's creaturely status, that accords the Creator absolute rights of disposal over his handiwork. It is here that the ideals of Christianity and heroic Germanic paganism coincide, and are celebrated by Tolkien in the Beowulf essay. But this need not involve naïve fatalism. Frodo fully expects to perish in Mordor, whether the quest is successful or not, and it is a prospect he has accepted for the greater good of others. Sam, however, though equally prepared to die at his master's side, takes the more robust view that where there is life there is also hope - 'hope, without guarantees' - and it is he that insists that Frodo should leave the erupting cavern of Orodruin and get as far down the slopes as they can before being overwhelmed by the lava flows. His character, simpler and more attuned to Nature than the intellectual Frodo, demonstrates that the absolute renunciation of possessiveness, commending one's existence to one's Creator, does not invalidate a healthy respect for life, including one's own. A life no longer esteemed and thrown away needlessly is no sacrifice at all, as Éowyn is fortunate enough to discover. In Middle-earth, God - or Providence - helps those who help themselves, as is seen in the eventual rescue of Sam and Frodo by the eagles. Gwaihir and Gandalf

are only able to find the unconscious hobbits on the wreck of the mountainside because Sam has insisted on crawling out into the open. Frodo, in an advanced stage of mental and physical exhaustion, suffering the trauma of a mutilated hand, only consents to this last effort because of his love for Sam; *"If you wish to go, I'll come."*<sup>69</sup> This additional strain, to his mind, futile, amounts for Frodo to an additional sacrifice: the giving up of the ease of a quick and imminent death.

Tolkien's thinking on the nature of sacrifice and self-sacrifice seem to have led to a revision of his concept of heroism. The Beowulf essay outlines a fundamentally archaic Germanic world view, figuratively placing man in a pool of light around which monsters - Grendel, his Dam, the dragon - circle, snapping closer and closer. It is the part of man to aspire to the status of a great warrior, to exert himself in arms to keep the monsters at bay for as long as possible, even though his strength must fail and the creatures prevail in the long term. This is the high-heroic ethos that pervades a number of Tolkien's writings, most notably the radio play, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, a dramatic sequel inspired by the Anglo-Saxon poem, The Battle of Maldon, which tells of the return of the body of one of Æthelred's warriors to his father's house, after his heroic stand against the Danes. It is an ethos that still prevails in the Hobbit, though to a less obvious extent (vis. Thorin's last stand before the doors of his ancestors), and may well have seemed a natural one in the after-math of the Great War, a conflict that had wreaked such unnecessary suffering that some kind of belief in the possibility of the heroic was needed to provide some measure of justification. The Second World War proved very different; British civilians suffered as they had never done before during a European conflict, and the ravages of Nazism and the human degradation that resulted had a profound effect on the psyche. Most ominous of all was the final salvo of the war; the Atomic Bomb. Tolkien has strongly refuted those critics who would attempt to turn his work into an allegory by identifying the Bomb with the Ring, both potentially weapons of limitless destruction, and in doing so he was correct. Such equations not only trivialize Tolkien's literary



achievement but also the socio-political situation of which the Bomb is a symptom. But an element of spiritual allegory is undoubtedly involved in Tolkien's altered perception of the heroic: with the terrifying possibility of nuclear devastation at hand, what is not required is a defiant warrior, a Samson prepared to pull down the Temple on all of our heads. A new heroism emerges in The Lord of the Rings, the heroism of the little man/hobbit; it is a heroism that consists of patient, steadfast, singleminded endurance. The old heroisms are there too, of course; Aragorn, Gimli, Théoden and Faramir. This is, after all, a romance. But the main emphasis is placed squarely on Frodo and Sam, whose very insignificance enables them to go where an armed elf warrior could never pass. In doing so, they must endure tremendous hardships, and be prepared to die in the accomplishment of their quest. It is a quieter kind of heroism, more suited to our contemporary needs, though every bit of a sacrifice as those who "rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing".<sup>70</sup> Perhaps even more of a sacrifice, since the little man as hero even abjures the certainty of having songs sung about him in after times. Sacrifice is the ultimate means to the transcendence of possessiveness.

### The Myth of Apocalypse

The sub-creation of secondary worlds of Story, as we have seen, figures largely in modern man's profound need to reinvent meaning for his fallen condition. Part of the reason for this is that, in such a world, actions and events can be given clearly identifiable significances, but of equal importance is the fact that such a secondary world can be so physically and temporally constructed as to leave man in no doubt as to his place in the scheme of things. We have a profound need to circumscribe ourselves, if only notionally, with a construct of Order, whatever that Order may consist of. Frank Kermode has rightly pointed to the difficulty the human psyche experiences in finding itself *in medias res*,<sup>71</sup> floating on the downstream of history, far from the source and, for all we know,

perhaps just as far from the mouth. 'The Fall of Man is in the past and off stage; the Redemption of Man in the far future';<sup>72</sup> Tolkien observes of his Secondary world, but the point is as apposite when applied to the primary world. Kerényi insists that all myths instance the *αρχή*, the original ground on which the present is built,<sup>73</sup> and certainly most myths do appeal backwards to creations and inaugurations, but there is one species of myth that points in the opposite direction; man the sub-creator also feels the need to construct an apocalyptic, completing the definition of his confused and interminably rectilinear temporal existence with a putative *terminus ad quem*. A second necessity for the creation of eschatological myths is the need to wipe clean the slate, to begin the world afresh purged of the sin of Adam; this recalls the etymology of *απο-καλεω*, to call back, to recall (from exile). It hardly comes as a surprise then that a cyclic conception of time, such as Eliade has described, is usually associated with apocalyptic imagery.

It is hardly surprising then that Tolkien's writings are heavily loaded with apocalyptic events and imagery. Two basic sources of this imagery can be identified. The first is that of Norse apocalyptic, derived from the *Elder* and *Prose Eddas* of Snorri. Tolkien himself tentatively commented that certain aspects of his work were most likely influenced by *Ragnorok* - "though it is not much like it."<sup>74</sup> The second is that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, most dramatically exemplified by the Biblical books of *Daniel* and *Revelation*.

Our chief source for Norse apocalyptic is the eleventh/twelfth century poem *Völsunga*, preserved and perhaps altered by Snorri, although Ellis Davidson has convincingly argued for the authenticity of much of its contents, rejecting the notion that it is made up of elements adapted from the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, citing strong thematic parallels from earlier Celtic and Germanic sources.<sup>75</sup> *Ragnorok*, the 'destruction of the powers', we are told, shall occur after the bitter and protracted *Fimbulvetr*, or 'Mighty-winter',<sup>76</sup> in which amid warfare and treachery, mankind shall be beset by packs of ravening wolves. This recalls vividly the hardships that

the Fellowship of the Ring encounter when trying to cross the Misty Mountains, seeking to avoid the southern route because of the treason of Saruman and his preparations for war. Having first been attacked by wolves in the night, they attempt the high pass on Mount Caradhras, but are driven back by blizzard conditions in which the snow lies higher than the hobbits' height. The suggestion is made that these meteorological conditions have a more cosmological significance, as Gimli comments wryly that the arm of Sauron has grown long if he can draw snow from the North to throw at them while still three hundred leagues from his domain, to which Gandalf grimly replies that 'his arm has grown long'.<sup>77</sup>

The long Norse Fimbul-winter is to last for three years, without the respite of summer, reflecting the anxiety of the ancients that the time might come when the sun would not return after the winter solstice.<sup>78</sup> The fear is further dramatized by Snorri's account of how the sun and the moon are swallowed by the children of the great Fenris wolf, bringing darkness to Midgarð. It comprises a potent archetypal image, and one that has resurfaced in recent decades as mankind experiences the perhaps more justifiable anxiety of contemplating the possibility of a 'nuclear-winter', consequent upon a global nuclear holocaust. It is the same archetype that was expertly used by Byron as the central image of his most terrifying and contemporary-seeming poems:

*The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars  
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,  
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;  
Morn came and went - and came, and brought no day,  
And men forgot their passions in the dread  
Of this, their desolation; and all hearts  
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light.<sup>79</sup>*

Yet for all Byron uses apocalyptic imagery to devastating effect, Darkness is not a true apocalypse; it portrays the end of the world, finally and devoid of hope for any future beyond. True apocalyptic



involves cosmological convulsions that destroy the corrupt world of the present to cleanse the way for a new, better world of tomorrow. As in Eliade's notion of ritual renewal, apocalypse amounts to being off with the old and on with the new. In archetypal terms, it may be regarded as the ultimate rebirth motif, and as such, as much a part of the sub-creative process and the initial cosmogonic act.

The sun swallowed by a wolf is an image that Tolkien takes up and uses to striking effect, as the Dark Lord launches the first salvos of the War of the Ring. Sauron, who is frequently associated with wolves, and indeed in *The Silmarillion* is referred to as the Lord of Werewolves, sends a darkness flowing across the sky, masking the heavenly luminaries. The phenomenon is first reported to Merry, and the reader, in the early morning as the Rohirrim make their frantic journey to defend Minas Tirith:

*'The world was darkling. The very air seemed brown, and all things were black and grey and shadowless; there was great stillness. No shape of cloud could be seen, unless it were far away westwards, where the furthest groping fingers of the great gloom still crawled onwards and a little light leaked through them. Overhead there hung a heavy roof, sombre and featureless, and the light seemed rather to be falling than growing.'*<sup>10</sup>

The actual exchange between Merry and the messenger who comes to his bivouac to wake him warrants close attention:

*"But the Sun has not risen, yet," said Merry.*

*"No, and will not rise today, Master Holbytla. Nor ever again, one would think, under this cloud. Though time does not stand still, though the sun be lost. Make haste!"*

If this scene seems a trifle familiar, we need only look to Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Richard is roused by Ratcliffe on the morning of the Battle of Bosworth:

*K.Richard: Who saw the sun today?*

*Ratcliffe:* *Not I, my lord.*

*K.Richard:* *Then he disdains to shine, for by the book  
He should have brav'd the east an hour ago.  
A black day will it be for somebody.*

*Ratcliffe!*

*Ratcliffe:* *My lord?*

*K.Richard:* *The sun will not be seen today.<sup>1</sup>*

I suspect that this striking similarity is not a piece of conscious plagiarism on Tolkien's part, Shakespeare being a writer for whom he always professed considerable antipathy.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare carefully builds up the eschatological imagery during the last act of the play, presenting Richard in as bestial terms as possible, ultimately depicting the Tudor triumph in terms of Richmond as St. Michael vanquishing the satanic dragon that Richard has become. The bloody saga of betrayal and murder that the Wars of the Roses has proved during his four play cycle rises to an apocalyptic climax resulting in a glorious new age of peace under Henry VII. Tolkien, similarly engaged in building up to the dramatic climax of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, in which the monstrous Lord of the Nazgûl shall be slain, would seem to have tapped in to the same potent archetypal image - that which Jung, borrowing from the alchemists, called the *negredo*, a reified Darkness, and for which there are many literary and legendary precedents.

The Norse Fimbul-winter is to be followed simultaneously by the unchaining of the monsters and the attack on the gods by the fire demons of Surtr. Surtr himself battles with, and slays, Freyr, a bright solar deity; another example of the sun being extinguished. The pattern is rehearsed in The Lord of the Rings, wherein we find the Company, retreating from the mountain blizzard to the gates of Moria, are attacked by a huge tentacled aquatic monster of the kraken type, in which one detects echos of Thór's nemesis, the Midgarð serpent, and then by the Balrog, a huge fire demon who does battle with Gandalf, the one member of the company whose constant association with fire and angelic nature characterizes him as the type of the solar hero, and pulls him down to his death. Furthermore,

the Balrog's breaking of the narrow bridge of the Khazad-dûm re-enacts the breaking of the rainbow-bridge *Bifröst*, which shatters beneath Surtr.

Many other elements of Norse apocalyptic are detectable in Tolkien's fiction, but in the form of isolated images - many of an archetypal nature, such as that of the extinguished sun. We might pause to note in passing that the monstrous Fenris wolf, who bites off the hand of the Norse god Tyr, is of course the original for Tolkien's wolf, Carcharoth, who bites off the hand of the mortal hero, Beren, along with the Silmaril in his grasp; that Galadriel's watery mirror that shows "many things, and not all have yet come to pass" perhaps has its genesis in Mimir's well; that the horn of Boromir, cleft at his death and returned by the Great River to his father is a descendant of the Gjallerhorn, with which Heimdall sounded the alarm at the gates of Asgarð; and that the figures of Gandalf and the night-wandering Saruman bear a striking resemblance to the 'grey-pilgrim' Óðin. But with the exception of the three-chapter sequence referred to above, tracing events from the nocturnal attack by the wolves of Hollin to Gandalf's fall in Moria, there is no coherent sequential, or narrative, parallel with the Norse apocalypse, which would seem to bear out Tolkien's rather diffident comment that, although influenced by Ragnorok, The Lord of the Rings was "not much like it".

A more recognisable apocalyptic structure emerges when we consider the extent to which Tolkien was influenced by scriptural sources. S.H.Hooke has commented on the sudden emergence of apocalyptic writings during the period of the Babylonian exile:

*the only explanation of the rise of this literature, as distinct from its characteristic form, lies in the fact that it was an attempt of a hope creating 'from its own wreck the thing it contemplates', to vindicate the claim of Israel to be the centre of world history, and therefore the central object of the purpose of God. <sup>23</sup>*



- which is to say, an attempt to create meaning in the midst of a ruined and exiled nation - a sub-creative response to the fallen condition. Hooke goes on to point out that Christianity itself is a result of a Jewish apocalyptic movement, and so we need have no qualms about accepting the Christian apocalyptic tradition as a natural extension of the Jewish. He has argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition exhibits three mythic motifs, which can be shown to derive from the ritual period before the age of the Prophets<sup>24</sup>:

- [a] the presence of a god-king; a Messianic figure,
- [b] belief in 'the ritual order on Earth being reproduced in the heavenly world', by which I propose to understand the intervention/participation of supernatural agencies; an instancing of the medieval dictum 'as above, so below'.
- [c] the cyclic nature of time.

The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings span three 'historical' Ages, preceded by a 'prehistoric' age of the Valar, before the awakening of the Children of Ilúvatar, itself suggestive of a cyclic temporal movement. On consideration it quickly becomes obvious that each Age ends with an apocalyptic upheaval, often involving parts of the earth being destroyed and remade, and always ushering in a new and more hopeful era. I propose then to examine each of the three Ages in turn, looking for evidence of the three motifs defined by Hooke.

The First Age is that which witnesses the terrible struggle of the elves and men against the first, and greatest Dark Lord, Melkor-Morgoth. Battle follows bloody battle against his demonic hordes of orcs, balrogs, dragons and trolls resulting in great suffering that culminates in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. Gradually all the elven realms in exile are sought out and destroyed by Morgoth. Only when the half-elven, half-mortal Eärendil finds his way to the Undyinglands to plead the case of elves and men and beg the forgiveness of the Valar does the tide turn against Morgoth. The Valar arise in arms and cross to Middle-earth, waging the War of Wrath against the Dark Lord, defeating him once and for all and cast

him into the Void beyond the confines of the world. In the course of this war, almost the whole of Beleriand is ruined and sinks beneath the sea.

- [a] For a militant messianic figure we need look no further than Eonwë, the Herald of Manwë and leader of the angelic forces. To the groaning elves and men of Middle-earth who had almost forsaken hope he must have seemed a god-king arising out of the West with forces enough to secure their deliverance from evil. To emphasize the point, we note that an early account makes Eonwë 'Fionwë-Úrion', the son of Manwë and Varda<sup>ES</sup> - in effect, a Son of God.<sup>ES</sup> Eärendil also has a claim to messianic imagery; he is prepared to forfeit his life, if need be, in his attempt to sue for the clemency of the Valar, and in being permitted to enter the Undyinglands he recalls the apocalyptic figure of the seer - an Enoch or an Elijah - who is taken up into heaven to witness wonders.
- [b] Unlike the preceding cycle of fruitless wars against Morgoth, the War of Wrath is conducted by a celestial army; heaven itself is drawn into the agonies of Middle-earth. Also the fates of the three *silmarilli* symbolizes the balance between heaven and earth; one is thrown into the fiery abyss, the second into the ocean, but the third is strapped to the brow of Eärendil, who sails the heavens nightly in his ship as the Evening Star, letting the world see the light of the holy jewel.
- [c] The War of Wrath is the second time the Powers have overthrown Morgoth, the first occasion being during the *primaeval* period before the beginning of the First Age and the awakening of the elves, so already the grounds of cyclic recurrence is laid. If this is the first of the elves' apocalypses, it is also the greatest and most far reaching. None of Morgoth's servants who later take his place can match him in power or malevolence, and it would seem that even pure evil is subject to the entropic process of degenerative recurrence.

The Second Age sees Morgoth's lieutenant, Sauron, gain in power and assume his master's mantle as the second Dark Lord. The Edain, the noblest clans of men, are given the island of Numénor, within sight of the Undyinglands, with the express commandment that they must never sail west to approach its shores, which remain forbidden to mortals. Eventually apostasy rears its head, as the Black Numénóreans, including the royal house, reject their elvish inheritance. King Ar-Pharazôn, waging a continental war against Sauron, is victorious, but Sauron permits himself to be taken to Numénor as a prisoner, and soon beguiles the king, winning the freedom to dedicate a Temple to the worship of Melkor, and to incite the king against the Valar. In this Sauron resembles the False Prophet of Revelation, who comes before the Beast.

[a] In this sequence it is Ar-Pharazôn himself, bearing the epithet 'The Golden', who appears as the messianic type of the god-king. After a reign of successful military campaigns, he turns his attention to the West, promising his subjects a conquest of Valinor itself, and eternal life for all as part of the spoils. It is interesting to note that the narrative during the apocalyptic finale of the Second Age tends to follow the exploits of the evil side - for all the author's sympathies lie with the Faithful Numénóreans led by Elendil who takes no part in Ar-Pharazôn's madness - perhaps because, unique among Tolkien's apocalyptic scenes, this is the only one that involves not demons, dragons and orcs, but is rather the result of impious human folly in refusing to accept man's creaturely status.

[b] Heaven is seen to become embroiled in the earthly turmoil in the intervention - unique in the whole of Tolkien's histories - of Ilúvatar himself. The Valar, assailed by Ar-Pharazôn, do not feel able to do battle with the sacred Children of Ilúvatar, and in response to Manwë's prayer the Supreme Deity himself intervenes by 'bending' the world; Arda, originally flat, is turned into a globe, so that no mortal may ever again sail directly to the Undyinglands. The geological turmoil involved brings part of the Encircling Mountains of Valinor down on the



heads of Ar-Pharazôn and his army, and causes the whole island of Numénor to sink beneath the waves.

[c] Mankind's future resolves itself for the second time in a remnant theory. The first age had ended with most of mankind being defeated as part of Morgoth's party, with an elect, the Edain, being honoured for their fidelity and taken over the sea to a new land. When Numénor is drowned, Elendil and the Faithful are spared the wrack by Ilúvatar's providence, being blown back across the ocean to found the Realms in Exile of Gondor and Arnor.

The Third Age sees the action return to Middle-earth, where the faithful Elendil and his followers establish themselves, despite Sauron's return to his stronghold of Mordor. After a ten year campaign the Last Alliance of Elves and Men oust him and Isildur cuts the Ring from his finger. The Ring is promptly lost in the River Anduin, and as the centuries pass the thrones of Gondor and Arnor fall vacant, Gondor being ruled by a Steward until the true heir can be found. As the Third Age approaches its climax the Ring is found and the struggle to claim it or destroy it begins.

[a] The messianic figure who emerges from the shadows as the Third Age draws to its apocalyptic end is the lost king, Aragorn, returning to take up the twin thrones of Gondor and Arnor, as we discussed in Chapter Five. It is sufficient to note here that it is Aragorn who conforms very readily to the type of long-looked-for monarch bringing hope of salvation to his people in their darkest hour that Hooke describes as typical of apocalyptic writing and which Tolkien has provided towards the climax of each of the Ages of Arda.

[b] Heavenly participation in the apocalypse of the Third Age is not on the earth-shattering scale of the two previous ages, but is nevertheless well represented. The first figures to note are the Istari, or wizards; angelic beings sent by the Valar to aid the West in its struggle against Sauron. Of the Five, the two Blue Wizards, Alatar and Pallando, are not mentioned in The Lord of the Rings, and a third, Radagast, plays a peripheral

part in the action. The focus is very much on Gandalf and Saruman. Once again we find the figure of the 'false prophet', this time in Saruman, the chief of the very beings sent to Middle-earth to help combat evil; as in the *Revelation of St John*, Saruman goes before 'the Beast', in that the forces of good must first turn their energies against him before confronting their greatest enemy. He it is that tries to persuade Gandalf that their best hope is to enter into league with Sauron, perhaps with a view to betraying him when an opportune moment presents itself. Gandalf represents not only Manwë and Varda, king and queen of the Valar, but also Nienna, a goddess associated with compassion and mercy<sup>27</sup>; he it is who frequently stresses the importance of pity.<sup>28</sup> It is Gandalf who, suffering death at the hands of the Balrog, is sent back to Middle-earth by the Valar in a bodily resurrected form, to complete his mission, invested now with the authority that Saruman has forfeited.

There are numerous other examples of supernatural involvement in the War of the Ring. An army of the Dead leaves Dunharrow to fight on Aragorn's side in fulfilment of an oath taken centuries earlier to his ancestor Isildur, spreading terror around them wherever they march. Leading the Morgul army is the Witch-King of Angmar, the ghost-like Lord of the Nazgûl, who when his hood is thrown back is revealed to be invisible except for two burning red eyes and an iron crown. As I remarked above, a Darkness spreads out of Mordor to blanket the sky, in inversion, perhaps, of Joshua's calling upon the sun to halt in its course.

- [c] As before, the cycle completes itself; evil is overthrown and a new age is inaugurated. The time of the elves is over, and they must either return over the sea or else dwindle in Middle-earth, for now begins the prophesied Dominion of Man. Significant elven characters who have hitherto remained in Middle-earth since former ages - Elrond and Galadriel - mark the end of another cycle by relinquishing their interests on mortal shores. But this is *only* the end of another cycle, it

is not in any sense an end. 'Ever after a respite, the Shadow takes on a new form and grows again', Gandalf has told Frodo, and indeed Tolkien did plan a sequel to The Lord of the Rings called The New Shadow, which was to concern the growth of a Morgoth-worshipping cult among the youth of Gondor during the reign of Aragorn's son.

Tolkien's fiction can be seen to be saturated not only with apocalyptic imagery, but also to concern itself with the predominant eschatological themes derived from both the Judeo-Christian and Norse traditions. This in itself is sufficient to demonstrate his concern with motifs of a religious nature. As Kermode puts it, "*what human need can be more profound than to humanize the common death*"<sup>99</sup> But his use of apocalyptic goes further than that; it presses close to the heart of Tolkien's æsthetic. Apocalyptic is "a vision of death and rebirth which is the essence of all great religions, the eternal re-enactment"<sup>90</sup> and as such contains in it the potential to re-create the sub-created world anew. The sub-creator is given the option of not one sub-creation but of limitless new worlds. The recovery of vision can be constantly renewed by a repeated escape from one secondary world to another, while the artist is able to try out more and more of the 'unused channels' of the Creator. The invention of apocalyptic enables the writer to provide a consonance with the key images of his creation - indeed one might suggest that such apocalypics are not 'invented' at all, but proceed as a matter of course from the substance of the sub-creation - effectively consolidating the shape, and formalizing the parameters, of the Secondary world.

In his discussion of apocalypticism, Kermode stressed the depth of modern man's psychological response to the notion of an End, if no longer imminent, then at least *immanent*, in our fiction and in our collective psyche. He points, for evidence, to the enduring vitality of our response to the Book of Revelation. In reviewing the history of chiliasm, he notes the curious resilience that apocalyptic prophecy has to being proved incorrect by events. Innumerable predictions have been made as to the date on which the perousia shall begin, and



identifications of historical personages with the key mythological personnel of the 'time of the end': the Beast, the Knight good and true, the False Prophet, the Woman clothed with the Sun &c. Many of these predictions have attracted earnest disciples, but it is found that, when they are proved wrong by the dawning of the long awaited date, or the death of one of their favoured would-be apocalyptic characters without anything untoward occurring, the apocalyptic prophecies are simply revised, cheerfully admitting an error in the calculations, but there is no diminution of the enthusiasm of the followers, as one might have expected. The need to project a framework onto the future would seem to be a very profound one, and if subsequent events invalidate that frame, it is of no great consequence since the real stuff of apocalypse, enshrining its emotive power, is the pantheon of archetypal images, and archetypes can be recast, reinterpreted and re-applied as is found necessary.

Kermode relates the pattern of apocalyptic to fiction, which seems a perfectly valid exercise since all novels must have an ending. Of particular interest to our study is the equation he makes between the cheerful willingness to re-adapt to changing circumstances of chiliastic prophesy to the narrative device of peripeteia. A twist in the plot falsifies the reader's expectations, determined as they are by the paradigms of fiction: in much the same way, an eschatological expectation pinned to a specific date provides a twist in the plot of the chiliast's projected pattern of the future - in the plot, as it were, of the Primary world. This irresistibly recalls Tolkien's stress on the nature of providence within The Lord of the Rings : 'hope, without guarantees'. The pattern has a affinity with the Consolation process that brings an eucatastrophe, an unlooked-for happy ending, that must nevertheless remain consonant with what has gone before. The *deus* in which Tolkien believed, is not one to issue forth *ex machina*. Thus Gandalf's rescue from Orthanc by the great eagle Gwaihir was not merely a piece of random good fortune, but was ultimately the result of Gandalf's own prudence in asking Radagast to ask the animals and birds to bring any news to him as Isengard. More importantly, the Ring is eventually destroyed only because of Gollum's intervention, but the fact that Gollum is present at Mount

Doom at the very moment that Frodo's will fails him, is a result of the many instances of pity and mercy that Frodo has shown to the miserable creature and prevailed upon others - Sam, Faramir - to show him. Thus, while these happy resolutions to difficult situations come from unexpected sources, the bare bones of cause and effect, Aristotle's organic unity, are already in place to justify the peripeteia.

In a true apocalyptic, the 'time of the end' is as much a phase of the process of creation as the moment of instauration. Any work of art must, at some point, be considered by its maker to be finished, however imperfectly so, unless death, as in Tolkien's case, intervenes. Apocalyptic not only ends, but also transforms, enacting a new inauguration. As such, it is an archetype of rebirth, projected from the human to the cosmological scale; that which both completes, and begins again, the act of Creation..

The notion of demythologising a work of fiction, particularly such imaginative works as Tolkien produced, is bound to strike many readers as offensive, but after all, no harm has been done; Tolkien's works still stand, and can be read, as enjoyable fictional and/or aesthetic experiences, for all my attempted existential reduction. But the exercise has, I believe, yielded an important insight into Tolkien's ethical thought, and particularly has served to demonstrate the extraordinary degree of cohesion between the narrative and the religious notions behind them. The Silmarillion, The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings are, among other things, artistic renderings of the ideas developed in the On Fairy Stories essay, but those ideas have as much to say about spiritual, or religious issues as about aesthetic.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. See Frieda Fordham's An Introduction to Jung's Psychology p.44ff
2. Neues Testament und Mythologie (S.P.C.K.)
3. Bronislaw Manilovski denies that myth had any symbolic function at all to the primitive mind, it being "not a mere tale told but a reality lived". When we contemplate myth today we must be aware that "it is the re-arising of a primordial reality in narrative form." ( Myth in Primitive Psychology). Bultmann has no wish to deny that reality, but insists that the narrative in its mythopoeic form is incomprehensible to modern man.
4. L.R. p.339
5. Beo. pp.16-17
6. Karl Barth, Bultmann: an Attempt to Understand Him in Kerygma and Myth Vol.II pp.84-5
7. See also Barth (as above), p.85 : *We neither understand nor expound the New Testament if our object is to extract general or theoretical propositions about God, the world or man, or even neutral historical data about events which happened long ago, or the record of religious, mystical, devotional or even ethical experiences....If the New Testament contains such things, they are only by-products, neither essential nor proper to it. Any such approach to the New Testament would be wrong. None of them represents what the New Testament writers meant to say....Everything they say is conditioned by the message they delivered."*
8. *ibid.* p.85
9. Bultmann
10. *ibid.*
11. Henderson, Myth in the New Testament, p.14
12. Frye actually castigates those 'foolish' enough to believe the ancients naïve enough to believe literally in a mythological



style cosmos.

13. Letters, p.236
14. *ibid.*
15. Kocher, *Iluvatar and the Sacred Flame*
16. Tolkien, *Sil.*p.15
17. See *Gnosticism*, by B. Walker.
18. Robley Evans, *Tolkien's World Creation: Degenerative Recurrence in Mythlore* No.57
19. Tolkien, *Sil.* p.30
20. *ibid.* p.335
21. *ibid.* p.17
22. *ibid.* pp.17-18
23. *idem.* *F.R.* Chapter 3, *passim*.
24. *ibid.* p.262
25. *idem.* *T.T.*p.125
26. *idem.* *F.R.* p.376
27. The phrase is David Harvey's, in *The Song of Middle-earth*, p.63.
28. Tolkien, *T.T.* p.418.
29. See, for example, Brenda Partridge's *No Sex Please - We're Hobbits: the Construction of Female Sexuality in 'The Lord of the Rings'*, or Nick Otty's *The Structuralist Guide to Middle-earth*, both in *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*.
30. Tolkien *op.cit.* p.424
31. Edmund Wilson, *Ooh, Those Awful Orcs*.
32. This principle is suggested by the fact that the life-span of the royal house of Numinor, originally massively extended beyond that of other men, has dwindled considerably in the generations between Elros and Aragorn.
33. Tolkien, *R.K.* p.364
34. *ibid.* p.424
- 34a. *idem.* *M.R.* p.417
35. P.Kocher, *op.cit.*
36. Perhaps explicable in that Yavanna not only sought Ilúvatar's permission before creating the Ents, but had the assistance of her fellow Valar in the enterprise.
37. Tolkien, *Sil.* p.21

38. *ibid.* p.23
- 38a. *idem.* M.R.p.400
- 38b. *idem.* *op.cit.*
- 38c. *idem.* *op.cit.*p.400
- 38d. *loc.cit.*
39. *idem.* Sil. p.29
40. *ibid.* *passim.*
41. *ibid.* pp.488-9
42. *ibid.* p.30
43. *ibid.* p.15
44. *idem.* F.R. p.89
45. *idem.* R.K. p. 269
46. Frodo's loss of his ring-finger at the moment of his moral collapse equates him, however momentarily, with Sauron, who's ring-fingure was cut from his hand with the One Ring by Isildur, and who's new bodily form, according to Gollum, stil lacks a digit. Earlier Pippin has been rebuked by Gandalf for calling Frodo the Lord of the Rings - "*The Lord of the Rings is not Frodo*", but at the Sammath Naur, Frodo lays claim to that very title by claiming the Ring, along with part of Sauron's *mana* locked within it, as his own, and within seconds suffers the mutilation that characterizes the defeat of the ambition that accompanies that title.
47. Tolkien, T.T. p.428
- 47a. *idem.* M.R. pp.417-8
- 47b. *loc.cit.*
- 47d. See Chapter Seven of present study.
48. W.H.Auden *The Dethronement of Power* in Isaacs & Zimbardo.
49. Tolkien, *Letters* p.253
50. *idem.* F.R. pp.182-183
51. *ibid.* pp.180-181
52. A.C.Petty, *One Ring to Bind Them All*, in *Mythlore* 1979
53. Ruth S.Noel, *The Mythology of Middle-earth*, p.120
54. Shippey, *op.cit.*p.80
55. Tolkien, U.T p.390 *passim*
56. G.Hargrove, *Who is Tom Bombadil* in *Mythlore*

57. Tolkien, Sil. p.33
- 57a. Tolkien, B.L.T.1, p.66
- 57b. *idem.* B.L.T.2, pp.259-60
58. T.R.O'Neill, The Individuated Hobbit pp.120-125.
59. Tolkien, F.R. p.166
60. O'Neill, op.cit.p.123
61. Tolkien, op.cit.p.347
62. *idem.* Letters p.179
63. The word is Tolkien's: O.F.S. p.53
64. *loc.cit.*
65. Tolkien, Letters p.237
66. *idem.* F.R. p.474
67. Shippey op.cit. Ch.5
68. Tolkien, T.T. p.12
69. *idem.*R.K. p.275
70. *ibid.* p.308
71. F.Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p.7, *passim*.
72. Tolkien, Letters p.387
73. Kerényi, Prolegomena to The Science of Mythology.
74. Tolkien op.cit. p.149
75. Ellis-Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe pp.203-449.
76. The Fimbul-winter is described, not in the Völuspá but in another poem, Vafþrúðnismál.
77. Tolkien, F.R. p.376
78. Ellis-Davidson, Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe p.191.
79. Byron, Darkness, Oxford.
80. Tolkien, R.K. p.123
81. Shakespeare, King Richard III 5:III, ll.278-283
82. Tolkien claimed to 'dislike cordially' the works of Shakespeare: see Carpenter, Biography pp.34 & 48
83. S.H.Hooke, The Siege Perilous p.128
84. And in effect derive from Babylonian ritual.
85. B.L.T.1, pp.58 & 62-3
86. At this early stage in the development of his mythology, Tolkien frequently applies the term 'gods' to the Vala. In relation to Ilúvatar, the term should be understood as analagous to the



pagan gods of Greece and Rome in the eyes of the Christian Renaissance.

87. Sil. p.31, although Tolkien originally conceived Nienna as a much darker Goddess of Death.

88. Tolkien, F.R. p.89

89. Kermode, op.cit.p.7

90. H.Ellis-Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, p.203

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE *ATHRABETH FINROD AH ANDRETH* : TOLKIEN, THE RELIGIOUS THINKER

In the week prior to the completion of this study, Christopher Tolkien has published the tenth volume of his father's drafts, notes and miscellaneous writings. Included in *Morgoth's Ring* is a previously unknown text in a very complete draft entitled *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*, or *The Debate between Finrod and Andreth*. It dates from the period when Tolkien returned to working on the *Silmarillion* material after the completion of *The Lord of the Rings*, a time when his ideas about the religious aspects of his *legendarium* were reaching their peak. It takes the form of a philosophical discussion between the elven High King Finrod Felagund and a wise woman, Andreth, of the mortal House of Bëor, concerning the nature of human mortality, and is followed by a full Commentary, itself with copious and informative notes. An inscription on the paper wrapping on which these drafts were preserved indicates clearly that the material was intended to form the final appendix to *The Silmarillion*,<sup>1</sup> and this positioning would have been appropriate, for in addition to providing hints about the otherwise unrecorded Fall of Man and the definitive discussion of Elven re-incarnation, the interlocutors evolve for the first time in Tolkien's sub-created world the explosive theological doctrine of the incarnation of God, of Ilúvatar, himself. It is, in my opinion, one of the most important texts to have entered the public arena of Tolkien studies since the publication of *The Silmarillion* itself, and for more than one reason is of great

relevance to the argument of this thesis. I shall therefore take the opportunity of inserting a discussion - which must perforce be a brief one - of this new material into what was to have been simply a peroratory chapter.

In fact the *Athrabeth* is a particularly apposite text for our consideration, since it brings together a number of the major characteristics of Tolkien's writing that have been considered in this study. We may regard it as paradigmatic of his creative technique, illustrating to best effect how serious issues of a religious concern may be considered from an interesting and original perspective by the distancing effect of placing them within a cohesive, well-constructed Secondary world. What Tolkien has called Art, that which gives sub-creational material 'the inner consistency of reality', is never allowed to lapse. The figures of Finrod and Andreth retain their psychological integrity, even undergoing character development within the course of the narrative, and are never allowed to diminish to the status of mere mouthpieces for opposing philosophical arguments, after the manner of, for example, eighteenth century dialogues, such as the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*<sup>2</sup> by Berkeley. Instead Tolkien's Debate resembles the very best of the Platonic Dialogues, preserving not only characterization, but also a developing drama. Indeed Tolkien's alternative translation for the word *athrabeth*, 'converse', is probably more apposite than the more formal 'debate', since Finrod is more interested in acquiring knowledge and seeking out the truth than upholding any particular argument, (not that he does not hold certain firm beliefs from the outset). Tolkien concedes that this was his intention, observing in the Commentary:

*The Athrabeth is a conversation, in which many assumptions and steps of thought must be supplied by the reader. Actually, though it deals with such things as death and the relation of Elves and Men to Time and Arda, and to one other, its real purpose is dramatic: to exhibit the generosity of Finrod's mind, his love and pity for Andreth, and the tragic situations that must arise in the meeting of Elves and Men.*<sup>3</sup>



What then is the dramatic situation? An introductory passage and atmospheric concluding paragraphs frame the actual conversation, and establish the scene. During the uneasy peace in Beleriand, while the Noldor are pressing hard the siege of Melkor's fortress of Angband in the North, Finrod, the High King, pays a visit to the people of Bëor. We know from The Silmarillion that of all the Noldorian princes, Finrod is the most concerned with wisdom and ideas, and has the greatest affection for mankind, as is clear from the warmth of his feeling towards the aging, mortal 'wise-woman', Andreth. She, in her turn, we are told, likes and trusts him, and is far more ready to discuss human lore with him, a representative of another race, than others of her kind are. And yet a certain bitterness is apparent in Andreth's tone, which seems to increase as the conversation progresses; she speaks disparagingly of the Elves seeing themselves as hosts, and Men as inferior guests despite the former's professions of affection for the latter. We learn the reason for this bitterness only at the end of the discussion: Andreth, in her youth, had loved Finrod's brother, Aegnor, who, as she supposes, deserted her through lordly elven disdain for her mortality. Finrod reveals that he knows all about the affair, and assures Andreth that Aegnor loved her in return, and suffered just as much as she from the separation, which he imposed upon himself from a sense of duty, rather than inclination. He had left her to join the war against Morgoth, vowing celibacy in her honour. Thus, a sensitively handled, romantic tragedy emerges from the discourse, rooting the philosophical content firmly in the soil of Tolkien's Secondary world, while at the same time remaining an appropriately themed subtext to the content of the discussion, which centres on the differing mortalities of Elves and Men, and their separate destinies.

The tone of the Converse is discursive rather than didactic, as suits the dramatic situation. Tolkien, as has already been noted, described his Elves and Men as "different aspects of the 'humane'", but his dislike of allegory means that they are no mere schematization. The two races represent complex aspects of the human experience and aspiration, and as such an existential definition of their respective significances is hardly possible. In practice,

this adumbrates to the speculative quality of the Converse, in which we find Finrod constantly emphasizing the near kinship between the two races, examining the similarities and differences in rejection of Andreth's insistence that the Elves consider Men to be inferior.

The *Athrabeth* contains a number of arguments of a theological concern, such as those examined in the last chapter, and it is to these that I wish briefly to examine:

### [a] The Nature of Death

Finrod, as we have seen, stresses the close kinship between Elves and Men, insisting that the only difference between them is their respective fates: every Elf will live for as long as Arda endures, and if slain, will be rehoused in a physical body, or reside in the Halls of Mandos in *fëa*, or spirit, state, while Men live short lives and must die, when their *fëar* will leave Arda, which is not its natural home. It will be remembered that *The Silmarillion*, as collated and published by Christopher Tolkien in 1977, describes death as Ilúvatar's gift to Men, and we are told that it is seen in a negative light only because of the lies of Melkor. Andreth, who as 'wise-woman' is not necessarily right in her arguments, but must be seen as representing the prevailing view of the most knowledgeable of her race, insists that mortality was not a gift, that Men were originally immortal, like the Elves, and death is terrible wound inflicted on them. Despite prompting, Finrod cannot get her to confirm that it was Melkor who inflicted the wound. He cannot believe that it could have been he, since to alter the destiny of one branch of the Children of Ilúvatar would mean that Melkor's power was greater far than the Elves had ever dreamed: it would indeed mean his power was commensurate with that of Ilúvatar, himself. He also points out that the Elves are not, as Andreth had supposed, deathless: they endure for as long as Arda survives, but since they firmly believe that Arda, the physical solar system, will be of finite duration, the Elves will perish with it. Furthermore, since the Elves love and identify with the physical world, and consider the *fëa*'s existence without its housing *hröa* to be unnatural, they cannot conceive of a spirit

existence for themselves beyond time and space.<sup>4</sup> They seem, then, to face utter annihilation at the end of time; their Shadow lies before them, as Man's lies in his past.

The fate of Men, as the Elves had understood it, is bound up with their belief that Arda is not Man's natural home, as it is for the Elves, and because of this, Man's *hröa*, or body, wears out quickly and cannot be renewed, hence short human life-spans. After death, the human *fëa* passes out of Creation, to join Ilúvatar. When Andreth insists that this was not originally the case, and that Man was deathless in the beginning, a puzzled Finrod searches for distinction in her argument, since if she is correct, and the only real difference between the two races is that of mortality, then there would be absolutely no difference between Men and Elves, in which case why should Ilúvatar have sent them separately into Arda, each represented by a different theme in the Music.

Speaking existentially, the dialogue is less a dialectic as a meditation on the nature of death. The elven position may be taken to represent the notion of survival of bodily death, but not eternal life. The spirit's existence may extend over an immense duration, but will ultimately be seen as finite, ending in oblivion. It is a concept that bears some similarity to the popular, though imprecise, conception of Buddhist nirvana, (Pali *nebbana* = 'a blowing out [of a flame]')<sup>5</sup> though it is notable that, unlike the followers of Gautama, who strive to minimize their inter-reaction with the world in order to escape the Great Wheel into just such oblivion, the Elves view such an end with horror. Their reaction is perhaps conditioned by their repeatedly stressed love for the world. Our immediate reaction might be to wonder if this 'love' does not amount to a form of possessiveness, but I think the answer here must be no: in *Morgoth's Ring* Tolkien is working round to the concept of the Elves as a 'largely unfallen' race, i.e. as a race as a whole. The Noldor certainly fall, specifically through the Kinslaying, if not in their defiance of the Valar, but no wrong-doing is recorded against the Vanar, the High Elves who dwell harmoniously in Valinor, absorbing the wisdom of the Valar, nor against those of the Teleri who inhabit the Isle of Tol Eressea and the city of Tirion, who peaceably spend



eternity building and sailing their ships. If, then, the Elves are to be regarded as a 'largely unfallen' race, we must assume an integration between them and the physical world, a unity of subject and object such as can only be dreamt of by fallen Man. Subsequently Elves find the notion of the existence of the spirit beyond all physical matter abhorrent. Though a slain elf has a free choice between re-incarnating or existing in the spirit state in the Halls of Mandos, both alternatives involve continued duration within the world of *hröar*, or matter.

*Man, however, is able through death to pass beyond the confines of the world. The possibility of eternal life in the divine presence of Ilúvatar is open to him. It is his freedom to act beyond the Music that gives the Elves hope that he might, somehow, accomplish the redemption of the fallen world, of Arda Marred.*

#### *b) The Fall of Man*

*Provisionally accepting Andreth's thesis that Man was originally deathless, Finrod is forced to reject the idea that the 'wound' of mortality could have been delivered by Melkor. Only Eru-Ilúvatar himself is powerful to alter the doom of one of his races of Children, and such a policy reversal could only have been prompted by the most extreme circumstances. "What did ye do, ye Men, long ago in the dark?" he repeatedly asks her. "How did ye anger Eru?" Andreth at first professes ignorance, but pressed as to the existence of any human legends or traditions, she concedes that her kinswoman Adanel, of the people of Marach may preserve such a tradition.*

*When Man enters the histories of The Silmarillion, which are of course ostensibly elven histories, he does so as a race already fallen, his sin lying many years earlier in an unknown land to the East. Those among his number who manage to rise above their fallen natures to become the Edain, later the men of Núminor, subsequently undergo a second fall through the actions of Ar-Pharazôn, as we have seen. But the initial lapse, is unrecorded, and this is the line that*

Andreth takes in the *Athrabeth*. The reason for this reticence on Tolkien's part was, in his own words:

*Already it is (if inevitably) too like a parody of Christianity. Any legend of the Fall would make it completely so.*<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, on an alternative draft was found with the *Athrabeth* in which Andreth, under pressure, tells the tale of the Fall of Man, as she heard it from Adanel of the House of Hador. Perhaps it occurred to Tolkien that there was very little difference, in terms of any apparent parody of Christianity, of speaking darkly of a forgotten Fall and providing a narrative of it. Rather typically he distances himself from the Tale of Adanel by adding a note to the effect that *"Nothing is hereby asserted concerning its 'truth', historical or otherwise"*<sup>7</sup> and reaffirms the supposed removes at which we have the tale. We are to suppose that he, as editor, is translating and presenting Númenórean material, which they had from elven sources, presumably from Finrod. He had it from Andreth, who in return heard it from Adanel, and even then it is merely to be regarded as a tradition, a vague echo from Man's terrible past. No-one, then, must seek to hold Tolkien down to the truth of the legend.

The chief elements of the Tale of Adanel may be briefly stated as follows.

Men awake somewhere in the east of Middle-earth, and hear a Voice, which they perceive with their hearts, not yet having learned language, that says to them: *"Ye are my children. I have sent you to dwell here. In time you will inherit all this Earth, but first ye must be children and learn. Call on me and I shall hear; for I am watching over you."* <sup>8</sup> They lead an idyllic life, afraid only of the Dark. The Voice seldom answers questions directly, saying; *"First seek to find the answers yourselves. For you will have joy in the finding and so grow from childhood and become wise."*

After a while Melkor appears among them, a crowned figure of great radiance and beauty. He showers them with gifts and material benefits, promising them knowledge. But when they mention the Voice, he tells them that it is *"the Voice of the Dark. It wishes to keep*

*you from me; for It is hungry for you."*<sup>9</sup> He, Melkor assures them, is Lord over the Dark. When they have become materially dependent upon his gifts, Melkor leaves them. One day a great shadow blots out the light of the sun, plunging Men into terror, then Melkor returns in a glory of light. Some among them, he says, are still listening to the Voice, and its Dark is drawing close. They must choose who they will have as master, himself, or the Dark. In their fear they bow before Melkor, repudiating the Voice, and at his command build a temple in which to worship him, at which point he vanishes in flame and smoke, plunging them into darkness; never again appearing in fair form, and issuing terrible commands and demanding gifts. The Voice is heard only once more, saying: *"Ye have abjured Me, but ye remain Mine. I gave you life. Now it shall be shortened, and each of you in a little while shall come to Me, to learn who is your Lord; the one you worship, or I who made him."* Melkor is disdainful of their appeals for help, saying it is as well that they should die, so as not to overrun the earth 'like lice'. This follows a striking description of fallen man's alienation from his environment:

*Thereafter we were grievously afflicted, by weariness, and hunger and sickness; and the Earth and all things in it were turned against us. Fire and Water rebelled against us. The birds and beasts shunned us, or if they were strong, assailed us. Plants gave us poison; and we feared the shadows under trees.*<sup>10</sup>

Melkor selects favourites and gives them tyrannical power over other men, searching out those who murmur against him or question the identity of the first Voice. Eventually some men realize that it is Melkor himself who is the Dark, and the first Voice was that of God, and they flee westwards, where they encounter the Elves of Beleriand and reach the sea, only to find that the Enemy has got there before him.

The fall narrative is by no means 'a parody of Christianity', as Christopher Tolkien notes; it is of a quite different character from that of Genesis. Certain common mythemes can be identified, of



course. The impatient desire of Men for knowledge reflects Adam's eating of the fruit, and indeed mankind's receipt of the Flame from Prometheus in the Greek equivalent of the Fall legend. But there are notable differences. Unlike Genesis, all of Mankind simultaneously commits a foolish act and falls collectively, rather than inheriting an original sin from a single, symbolic ancestor. This detail allows for the partial redemption of the Men who are to become the Edain, who return to the love of Eru and are rewarded with extended life spans and the privilege of choosing the hour of their own death.' Equally noteworthy is the paternalistic nature of the Voice. Ilúvatar is the Heavenly Father of the New Testament, rather than the more formidable, less approachable Yahweh of the Old, constantly stressing Men's original status as children. This conveniently avoids the awkward question that arises from Genesis: 'Why was God so opposed to man obtaining knowledge?' (and all the more so the jealous rage of Zeus in the Prometheus legend). Eru does not want to deny Men knowledge, but merely wants them to acquire it gradually for themselves. It amounts to true education: *ex ducare* = 'to lead out of', which allows time for the growth of wisdom, by which the use of the knowledge is tempered. One is reminded of a fond parent who doesn't want his children to grow up too quickly, but instead wants to enjoy their childhood with them. Lastly we might observe that mankind originally falls under Melkor's influence through his kindling of their possessiveness, through plying them with gifts until they become materially dependent on him, and thereafter keeps them there through fear.

#### [c] Redemption

*And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful.<sup>12</sup>*

These are the words spoken by Ilúvatar to Melkor, after his attempts to mar the Music of Creation; words, which we have considered already, and must now finally return to. Melkor, as we have seen, through lies and coercion, has perverted Mankind, inducing him to hate and deny Ilúvatar and to worship himself, resulting in man's hugely reduced life-span and death. What 'things more wonderful' could possibly result from this? The answer is to be found in the *Athrabeth*, and must come as something of a shock to all Tolkien scholars, since nothing formerly within the public domain has indicated that Tolkien was considering incorporating such a concept into the 'theology' of Arda. Finrod, as we have seen, voices the Elves desperate hope that the Elves can ultimately be saved as a result of the actions of Men, and specifically their freedom to die. He speculatively broaches what he calls 'the Old Hope of Men'<sup>13</sup>: that there shall come a time when Eru-Ilúvatar himself shall enter his own creation, *incarnated as a man*.

This explosive suggestion shifts the whole theoretical thrust of Tolkien's conception of the religious content of his *legendarium*. Christopher Tolkien remarks that :

*this is surely not a parody, nor even a parallel, but the extension - if only represented as vision, hope, or prophecy - of the 'theology' of Arda into specifically, and of course, centrally, Christian beliefs.*<sup>14</sup>

We know that the events depicted in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are intended to represent a period of the pre-history of our own world, and that the Fourth Age, the Age of Men, which commences with the downfall of Sauron, is intended to be the Age in which we now live. But here we find Tolkien re-angling his *mythos* to pave the way for the birth and crucifixion of Christ, albeit at a time way beyond the scope of his writings.

Tolkien does not expand on his incarnation hypothesis, but we can do so very easily. Melkor has incarnated himself as the Morgoth, and in doing so, has permeated physical matter with his corrupt being. This 'Melkor ingredient'<sup>15</sup> in physical matter leads to an entropic

process of erosion and decay that will ultimately lead to the end of Arda, and with it, the Elves. If Eru-Ilúvatar incarnates also, his immeasurably superior being would presumably eradicate the taint of the 'Melkor ingredient'. Arda Marred would become Arda Healed, a recreation of the type of the heavenly Jerusalem, in which the regenerated - or redeemed - physical world could endure for all eternity, ensuring the Elves true immortality. Andreth wants to know how Eru could possibly enter his own creation: how can the lesser contain the greater? Finrod replies with a rudimentary hypothesis of the plurality of the personality of the Godhead, suggesting that, if he did incarnate, another part of Ilúvatar would have to remain outside of Creation, as an Author is simultaneously present within and without his creation. We already know that the creative impulse of Eru, that which sustains Being, is the Flame Imperishable, which is an analogue of the Holy Spirit; here we have a suggestion of two distinct aspects of Eru ('the One'), that of Ilúvatar (the Father) and his incarnate form as one of the *Eruhíni*, one of his own Children (the Son). A trinitarian deity is here being implied.

But why must Eru incarnate as a Man? At least two reasons suggest themselves. The first is the practical one, that if He incarnated as an Elf, and I mean a true Elf, rather than a being with the appearance of being an Elf, he would presumably find himself trapped for all eternity within Arda, since no true Elf can exist beyond its confines of time and space. A man, however, has a short lifespan, and is then released from Creation, into the Halls of Ilúvatar, thanks to the machinations of Melkor. Man's mortality makes him a suitable vessel for God's intervention into Creation. The act of incarnation, the purification of the physical matter that sustains the *hröar* of the Elves, is sufficient to save the Elves, but what of mankind, who do not depend upon the *hröar* for their eternal lives? No Elf ever worshipped Melkor, no matter what coercion was used, but originally all Mankind did so, and only a small minority returned to allegiance to Eru. And so we come to the second reason for incarnating as a Man. Death provides Ilúvatar with an exit from Creation, but it remains the terror of Men. He shall therefore turn it into the means for bringing those men that still walk with the



Shadow in their hearts back to their eternal father. If Eru himself is known to have suffered and triumphed over death, then the path to true faith in God is swabbed clean of the morass of Melkor. Of course this can only be accomplished when the Gospel is spread to the heathen - but that may be left to the Christian theologians of the late Fourth Age.

At last the clue to the meaning of Tolkien's division of humanity into Elves and Men emerges. If, for the sake of clearer understanding, we must force the elements of the myth into the straitjacket of a schematized system, we might express it something like this:

The Elves are unfallen, and a fully integrated aspect of physical creation that will endure as sentient beings for as long as creation lasts, (i.e. Man in his pre-lapsarian condition, lord of Creation, and yet an integral part of it, formed from the dust of Eden) Tolkien's Men, whatever their initial state, are a fallen race, who have suffered a disjunction from the creation they were once a part of. His mortality is at once his punishment and his salvation, for after his earthly life, 'nasty, brutish and short', his spirit is called out of creation to atone for his sin and, ultimately, to dwell with God outside of Time. In other words, the loss of the Edenic state, an apparent punishment, is the means to raising Man to a far greater status; true spiritual immortality and union with the Godhead. The pattern is the familiar three-stage dialectic of *grandeur/misère/redemption*, discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this study, the final stage of which, a direct result of the middle, is considered greater than the first.

## Conclusion

The new material contained in sections Three and Four of *Morgoth's Ring* indicate that Tolkien was engaged in a major rethink of the 'theology' of his *legendarium*. Just how far reaching this might prove cannot be known until the publication of a companion

volume currently in preparation. I have not had time, in this chapter, to do full justice to all the implications of the new material, and clearly a new, major study will be required when all of his papers have been published. It has been satisfying, however, to find many of my speculations in the course of this study confirmed from Tolkien's own hand, as it were, and I am pleased to say that, while the new material has extended the scope of this field, it had not actually contradicted any of the arguments of this thesis. To the extent that I have argued that Tolkien is a religious religious writer, I am given further support by the revelation that he was attempting to revise his entire myth cycle to bring it into line with what might be considered a kind of proto-Christian theology.

In the Introduction I defined four aspects in which Tolkien's work may be regarded as religious. The time has now come to re-examine them in the light of the foregoing discussions.

[1] Tolkien's method is Christian:

I suggested that Tolkien's method, his whole philosophical æsthetic, as it were, with which he approached the act of writing, was one predicated on Christian doctrines. Chapter One compared the R/E/C/ processes with Lonergan's systematic theology, and found that, even if one leaves aside the notion of fantasy providing a means to achieve a religious heuresis, the processes of Recovery, Escape and Consolation were deeply rooted in the Christian notion of the Fall and of the idea of Redemption. This is particularly true of Consolation, since Tolkien specifically makes a qualitative identification between the eucatastrophe of the fairy story and the Resurrection of Christ, the eucatastrophe of human history. Chapter Two sought to provide a context for the idea of language possessing an inherent power, by charting the history of the Romantic myth of the Adamic language. Against this background we found support for Tolkien's views in the work of Dr. Edwards, from whom we borrowed the important three-stage dialectic, a pattern charting Fall and Redemption that

was to surface on several occasions in other aspects of Tolkien's work.

[iii] Tolkien's method is religious:

I next expanded the definition of 'religious' to pass beyond Christianity and embrace the mythic, arguing that the writing process was for Tolkien a mythic one; to sub-create was to continue the great cosmogonic moment, to participate in the myth of the creation of the world in a full, metaphysical sense. In rather more prosaic terms we found a more solid anthropological base for Tolkien's theories in the work of Owen Barfield, and saw that only through the metaphoric language of myth could we ever hope to come close to understanding the environmental integration attributed to 'unfallen' Man.

[iiii] Tolkien's texts are Christian:

I turned now to the nature of Tolkien's major fantasy texts themselves, arguing that much of their imagery and thematic material alluded, often subliminally, to the Christian scriptures, although without any doctrinal orientation. We saw this at work in Chapter Five, in which I made a detailed review of messianic imagery in The Lord of the Rings, and found a large body of allusive material in this narrow category alone. We also considered the possibility that Jungian Archetypes provide a common origin for the most powerful images of the scriptures and Tolkien's work, and if so, the latter may well achieve a contemporary re-casting of powerful mythemes. In Chapter Six I explored Tolkien's treatment of some of the classic issues of Christian theology: evil, free-will and determinism, power and authority, temptation, sacrifice and Apocalyptic. From these emerged what we identified as the characteristically Tolkienian sin of possessiveness.



[iv] Tolkien's texts are religious:

Finally I stated that Tolkien's texts are religious, in the broader sense, in that they are capable of functioning as what I have termed 'quasi-scripture'. They appropriate a degree of cultural authority from genuine scriptural material by a subtle emulation of language and imagery. In Chapter Four I examined Tolkien's imitation of Old Testament language forms, and the effects it has, while in the latter part of Chapter Five I considered two examples of non-determinate, or thematically allusive, imagery were also explored, that of the stars and the western ocean, which illustrate how a climate of symbolically meaningful allusion can be built up which contains resonances of the numinous.

J.R.R. Tolkien's works are steeped in religious sensibility. That much, I hope, I have demonstrated. But he was not a religious apologist. Though letters to friends and family often argue theological points, it was never the intention, nor the effect, of the great fictions to propound or develop, in any systematic way, any particular theological line. That was the province of his colleague, Lewis. Admittedly the new direction his thoughts were taking by the late fifties, as indicated in the new material discussed above, with his sudden, overt interest in explicitly Christian motives such as Original Sin and the Incarnation of God, does carry him into the territory more characteristic of C.S. Lewis. But Lewis' significant apologetic writings are non-fiction. The Narnia series contains little of interest for the serious theologian; the Ransom series, rather more so, but here Lewis is straying into Tolkienian territory. The sub-created world, free of dogma, in which the writer is able to explore those 'channels of creation' that the Creator - so far as we can know - did not use. He is free to rhapsodize on religious themes, teasing them out, combining and interweaving them, displaying them from unusual angles (so that we might 'see things as we were meant to see them'?).

My feeling - although there is not space enough here to justify it properly - is that Tolkien does this much better than Lewis.

Perhaps this is because Tolkien had evolved a detailed set of æsthetic theories as to how this should be accomplished, although I suspect that the real reason is simply that Tolkien is the better story teller. Whatever cultural authority his work may arrogate to itself by a quality-by association technique, the sheer depth and detail of the Secondary world, its internal cohesion and integrity, achieves an authority of its own; the authority of true myth, perhaps, or simply of the tale well told. It is this authority that ensures that Tolkien's work has brought, and will continue to bring, religious issues to the attention of the reading public for their consideration. And if Tolkien's 'Great Hope' should prove true, it might even redeem them a little.

## NOTES : CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Tolkien, M.R. p.329
2. Berkeley, pub. Dent.
3. Tolkien, *op. cit.* p.335
4. *ibid.* pp.330-331
5. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* p.432
6. Tolkien *op. cit.* p.354
7. *ibid.* p.334
8. *ibid.* p.345
9. *ibid.* p.346
10. *ibid.* p.348
11. A privilege later accorded to Aragorn.
12. *idem.* *Sil.* p.17
13. *idem.* M.R. p.221
14. *ibid.* p.356
15. *ibid.* p.400



## APPENDIX

### THE MAJOR PUBLICATIONS OF J. R. R. TOLKIEN

What follows is a list of the major works of J.R.R. Tolkien *that bear upon this study*. It is by no means a complete bibliography, for the which I refer the reader to Appendix C of Carpenter's excellent J.R.R. Tolkien: a Biography. For the benefit of readers not intimately acquainted with Tolkien's fictional works, to which I have made many and detailed references in the course of this study, I have provided a brief plot synopsis where relevant.

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again (1937), published by George Allen and Unwin.

Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit, is reluctantly recruited by the wizard Gandalf and a troop of dwarves on their mission to travel east to the Lonely Mountain to recover the treasure of their ancestors from the marauding dragon, Smaug. Their leader is Thorin Oakenshield, the dwarvish king-in-exile, who is determined to recover the Arkenstone, the heirloom of his house. In the course of the journey, during which they pass through Rivendell and receive the advice of Elrond Halfelven, they are variously attacked by trolls, goblins (or orcs, as Tolkien later preferred to call them), wolves, monstrous spiders and belligerent elves. They escape thanks to Gandalf's magic, and Bilbo's resourcefulness. Lost in the tunnels beneath the Misty Mountains, Bilbo finds a ring which has been dropped by a slimey creature known as Gollum, which has the power to make the wearer invisible. Bilbo uses the ring to penetrate the Lonely Mountain's treasure chamber, and encounters Smaug. The dragon is slain by the bowman, Bard, of the nearby town of Esgaroth, but the men of Esgaroth demand a share of the dragon's hoard, and are joined in this by the army of the King of the Wood Elves. Unknown to Thorin, Bilbo takes the Arkenstone to buy off the Elven King, but a timely attack by armies of orcs, wolves and bats force the Free Peoples, Dwarves, Elves and Men, to forget their petty squabbles and unite in the face of the common enemy. The allies are victorious, but Thorin is mortally wounded. He forgives Bilbo, acknowledging his sin of possessiveness before he dies. Bilbo returns home a wiser and much richer hobbit.

References to The Hobbit are to the 3rd pbk ed, (1979) edition.

Leaf by Niggle (1945) in *The Dublin Review* No.432 (Jan). A spiritual allegory, despite Tolkien's famous dislike of the term. Later reprinted in *Tree and Leaf*. References are to the 1988 edition.

On Fairy Stories (1947), in Essays Presented to Charles Williams, this seminal essay was originally delivered as the Andrew Lang

Lecture in St.Andrews, 1938. The arguments of the essay are fully discussed in Chapters 1-3 of this study.

The essay was later republished in Tree and Leaf, and all references are to the 1988 Unwin edition of that work.

Farmer Giles of Ham (1949), the tale, supposedly translated by Tolkien from a Latin source, of a down-to-earth farmer who single-handedly takes on, and tames the dragon Chrysophylax, which he then uses to get the better of his faithless and comically effete king, eventually becoming king himself. References are to *Farmer Giles of Ham/The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, Unwin Books Edition, 2nd impression, 1977.

The Lord of the Rings, published in three volumes; all references are: to the Unwin Paperbacks Third Edition, 1979.

- 1) The Fellowship of the Ring, being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings (1954), George Allen & Unwin, London.

Frodo Baggins inherits Bilbo's ring, and learns from Gandalf that it is the Ruling Ring, forged by the second Dark Lord, Sauron, to control all the other rings of power, and that Sauron's servants, the Nazgûl, searching for the ring that will allow their master to conquer Middle-earth, have heard the name of Baggins and are closing in on the Shire. When Gandalf goes unaccountably missing, Frodo flees the Shire with his servant Sam and his young cousins, Merry and Pippin. They make for Rivendell, to seek Elrond's advice. In the Old Forest they are trapped by a malignant willow tree, and later by a barrow wight, and on both occasions are rescued by the enigmatic Tom Bombadil. Reaching the inn at Bree, Frodo foolishly lets the ring slip onto his finger, vanishing in full view of the crowd. He is taken to task by a hooded stranger, who seems to know Frodo's history and mission, and who is eventually revealed as Aragorn, the lost heir to the twin kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor. Under his protection, the hobbits escape a raid by the Nazgûl in the form of nine Black Riders, and resume their journey. The Black Riders attack the company again under the hill of Weathertop and Frodo is wounded with a poisoned knife. Reaching Rivendell in time, Elrond is able to heal Frodo's wound, and at a great Council it is decided that the Ring must be destroyed by casting it into the Cracks of Doom, volcanic fissures where Sauron originally forged it, located at the centre of the Enemy's own land of Mordor. Gandalf explains his long absence; he has been held prisoner by Saruman, the head of his order, who has betrayed the allies and is hunting the Ring for himself. A Company of Nine is formed, to take the Ring to Mt. Doom; the four hobbits, Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, an elf prince, Gimli the dwarf and Boromir, the eldest son of the ruling Steward of Gondor. Journeying south, the company attempt to cross the Misty Mountains via the long-deserted mines of Moria, but are attacked by orcs and an ancient fire demon, the Balrog, with which Gandalf, in single combat, falls into the chasm of Khazad-dûm and is lost. Aragorn leads the company to the elven woodland of Lothlórien, protected by the power of the Lady Galadriel, who holds one of the Three Elven



Rings. Further down river, they reach the point when they must decide to go east with Frodo to Mordor, or to split the company, some going with Boromir to reinforce Gondor against the coming war with Sauron. In a fit of madness, Boromir tries to take the Ring, but Frodo eludes him, travelling to Mordor with only Sam for company. Boromir redeems himself and dies a hero's death defending Merry and Pippin from an orc attack, but the two younger hobbits are carried off.

ii) The Two Towers, being the Second Part of The Lord of the Rings  
(1954)

The action splits into two main strands. Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli track the orc horde in the hope of finding the young hobbits alive, but meet a company of armed horse-lords, the Riders of Rohan, under the command of Éomer, nephew of King Théoden of Rohan. Éomer reports that his men have intercepted and destroyed the orc band, but saw no sign of any 'halflings'. Aragorn and his companions press on till they reach the site of the battle, under the eaves of Fangorn Forest. Here they are approached by a hooded figure whom they take to be Saruman, but who proves to be the resurrected Gandalf, now dressed not in grey, but in brilliant white. Together they proceed to Théoden's capital of Edoras, where Gandalf heals the King of the debilitating influence of his councillor, Gríma Wormtongue, an agent of Saruman. The army of Rohan makes its way to the fortress of Helm's Deep, to await the onslaught of Saruman's orc armies. Meanwhile, Merry and Pippin have escaped their orc captors and have been befriended by Treebeard, an ent, or tree-like giant. Treebeard and the other ents are roused to ire by the attacks made on the forest by Saruman's orcs, and march to war, destroying his fortress of Isengard. Aragorn and his companions aid the men of Rohan in a desperate defence of the Hornburg, but the odds are against them. As dawn arrives, so too does Gandalf and a mysterious forest has sprung up in the night to surround Saruman's army. It is composed of Treebeard's huorns, or living trees, who polish off the tree-hating orcs. Gandalf conducts Aragorn and company to the ruins of Isengard, where they parley with the captured Saruman, during which Wormtongue hurls a large round stone at the company. This proves to be the palantír, or seeing stone, of the ancient kings, and Aragorn uses it to declare his existence and enmity to Sauron. That same night his followers from the north arrive with his royal standard. Pippin has also looked into the palantír and is traumatized by a vision of Sauron. Gandalf takes him to Minas Tirith on his fleet horse, Shadowfax, where the hobbit gives the ruling steward, Denethor, an account of his son, Boromir's, heroic death. Pippin pledges allegiance to the city of Minas Tirith.

Back in Rohan, Théoden musters his armies at Dunharrow, and receives the Red Arrow, the ancient signal for military assistance from Gondor. Merry pledges allegiance to the King of Rohan, and finds a young warrior called Dernhelm who is prepared to carry him on his horse. They begin their frantic ride south. Aragorn, meanwhile, has word that the pirates of



the south are planning to approach Minas Tirith by river to reinforce Sauron's attacking army. He leads his company through the subterranean Paths of the Dead, with only the strength of his will protecting the lives and sanity of his mortal companions.

Frodo and Sam, meanwhile have become aware that someone is following them and manage to capture him: Gollum. He is forced to swear to serve Frodo, the master of the 'Precious', and lead him by secret ways into Mordor. In Ithilien the hobbits meet a Gondorian scouting party led by Faramir, Boromir's younger brother. Faramir guesses what Frodo is carrying, but unlike his brother, resists temptation and lets Frodo go on his way with his blessing. In the mountain pass of Cirith Ungol, Gollum treacherously leads the hobbits into the lair of the monstrous spider Shelob, who stings Frodo but is slain by Sam. Believing Frodo to be dead, Sam takes the ring with the intention of completing the mission, but moments later overhears from a passing orc troop that Frodo is merely unconscious. The orcs take Frodo to their watch tower, while Sam hesitates between his duty to the quest and his duty to his master.

1111 *The Return of the King, being the Third Part of The Lord of the Rings* [1955].

Minas Tirith prepares for the onslaught from Mordor. Faramir returns from his scouting trip, and Denethor is furious to learn that he has rejected the opportunity to seize the Ring to use for the city's defence, despite Gandalf's warnings that anyone who attempts to do so would be made evil by the ring in his turn. The siege begins, and Faramir is seriously wounded. As the gate breaks, Gandalf confronts the Lord of the Nazgûl; at the last moment the horns of the Rohirrim are heard; Théoden and Eömer arrive in time to drive back the Morgul army. Denethor, using the palantír of Minas Tirith, has seen the pirate ships approaching the city; plunged into despair, he is convinced that all is lost and builds a pyre on which to burn Faramir and himself alive. Merry alerts Gandalf, who is able to save Faramir, but Denethor perishes. On the battlefield, Théoden's horse falls on him, crushing the old man to death. The Lord of the Nazgûl, of whom it was prophesied could never be slain by mortal man, attempts to desecrate his body, but it is heroically defended by Dernhelm and Merry; Dernhelm proves to be a woman, Eömer's sister, Eöwyn, seeking glorious death in battle because of her unrequited love for Aragorn. Together, she and Merry manage to slay the Nazgûl lord. The battle is turning to the enemy's advantage, and the pirate ships finally arrive; but they are manned by Aragorn and his band who have emerged from the Paths of the Dead with a phantom army in tow; the Oathbreakers of Dunharrow, who long ago failed to keep their allegiance to Aragorn's ancestor, now earn their repose by helping him seize the pirate fleet. Aragorn's arrival sways the battle and the allies are victorious. With the hands of a healer, Aragorn restores Faramir, Eöwyn and Merry to health. What is left of the army of the West now marches to the Black Gate of Mordor, to challenge Sauron one last time, and to draw his attention in the

hope that the Ringbearer may yet complete his mission.

Sam manages to enter the Tower of Cirith Ungol, only to find it deserted. The orcs, arguing over Frodo's possessions, have slain each other. Frodo is rescued, and dressed as orcs the hobbits pass on into the desolate, ash-covered land of Mordor. After great physical hardship, Frodo becoming weaker and the Ring growing heavier, they arrive at Mt. Doom. Half way up they are attacked by Gollum. As Sam fights him off, Frodo reaches the Cracks of Doom, but at this point his will fails him and he announces that he chooses to keep the Ring for himself. As he puts it on, and Sauron becomes suddenly aware of his presence and his own peril, Gollum bites Frodo's finger off, and the Ring with it; at the moment of his triumph, he falls in to the Cracks of Doom, taking the Ring to destruction. Sauron's dark tower crumbles and he is swept away in the form of a black cloud. The hobbits wait on the mountain to perish in the lava flows, but are rescued by the great eagles, one of which bears Gandalf over the ruins of Mordor.

Frodo and Sam, recovering from their ordeal, are reunited with their comrades and hailed as heroes. They attend Aragorn's coronation and marriage, then return north. Upon arriving home, they find that the Shire has been taken over by human ruffians who treat the hobbits like slaves; they are under the command of one Sharkey, who has installed himself at Bag End. The four young hobbits are now experienced enough to take all this in their stride; rallying the hobbit population, Merry and Pippin, now seasoned warriors of Rohan and Gondor, defeat the encroachers in the Battle of Bywater. Sharkey is then confronted, and turns out to be Saruman himself, escaped from the Ents. Frodo will not allow him to be harmed, and orders him to leave the Shire, but he is murdered by Wormtongue as he leaves. Several years are spent putting the Shire to rights. Sam becomes mayor, but accompanies Frodo on one last journey to the Grey Havens, where he sees him embark over the ocean for the Undying lands where his wounds will be healed. With Frodo go Bilbo, Elrond, Galadriel and Gandalf, the last three now openly wearing the Three Elven Rings of power.

The Adventures of Tom Bombadil [1961], is a collection of 'hobbit verse', aimed very much at a juvenile audience, although one or two poems have a much darker feel, particularly The Sea-bell discussed in Chapter Five. For adults, this collection has the effect of deepening the sub-created world by the addition of yet another layer of fictive 'reality'. References are to the Unwin Books Edition, 1977.

Smith of Wootton Major [1967], is a traditional fairy tale, which embodies many of Tolkien's beliefs about the genre as set out in his seminal essay. Smith, as a boy, swallows a silver star stirred into the Great Cake by a disguised King of Faerie, which in later life enables him to journey often into the land of Faerie, until the time comes to hand it on to another child. He proves his worthiness of the gift by rejecting possessiveness



and passing the star on to the grandchild of his old enemy.

References are to the Unwin Books Edition, 1975.

The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son [1977], was written as a short radio play, designed as a domestic sequel to the Anglo-Saxon fragment The Battle of Maldon; it contains reflections on the nature of heroism. References are to the Unwin Books Edition 1975.

The Silmarillion (1977), posthumously assembled and published by Christopher Tolkien, this is the all-encompassing chronicles of Middle-earth, from the Creation myth to the overthrow of Sauron at the end of the Third Age. A comprehensive summary of this highly complex narrative is impossible in the available space, and a few words about the 'books' into which the work is divided will have to suffice to give an indication of its structure. It consists, then, of:

The Ainulindalë - the elven creation myth in which Ilúvatar brings forth the Ainur, the offspring of his thoughts, and has them sing a Great Music. The Music is marred three times by Meeker, who creates discords by introducing his own themes. Ilúvatar allows the Ainur to see their music in the form of a vision, and then gives the vision actuality; Creation. Some of the Ainur, the Valar, descend into Arda, the World, to help shape the protean earth and await the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men. Melkor also enters creation, seeking power for himself.

The Valaquenta describes the characters of the nine lords and nine ladies of the Valar, later to be revered as deities. They are ruled over by Manwë, lord of the winds and his queen, Varda, lady of the stars. Serving the Valar are an unspecified number of Maiar, angelic beings of a secondary order, of whom the most important, in terms of plot, rather than rank, is Olórin, who in The Lord of the Rings is incarnated as Gandalf. Melkor also has his servants, aiding his dark purposes, chief among them being Sauron and Gothmog.

The Quenta Silmarillion, or tale of the Silmarils, narrates the first wars between the Valar and Melkor, the coming of the elves, the making of the three great jewels, the silmarilli, by Fëanor, the Noldorian elf, and their theft by Melkor. Fëanor leads his people into exile in Middle-earth, in defiance of the Valar, in order to pursue Melkor - now called Morgoth - and wreak vengeance. The several stories of the the elven realms in exile are told, as well as the coming of Men, and the increasingly disastrous series of battles with Morgoth's demonic forces. Eventually, Earendil, a prince of both elven and mortal blood, finds his way back to the Undying Lands and persuades the Valar to once again intervene in the affairs of Middle-earth. An angelic army comes from the West and destroys Morgoth, casting him out of the created world into the void.

The Akallabêth describes the Second Age, and relates the history of the Island of Núminor, given to the houses of Men loyal to Ilúvatar, set half way between Middle-earth and the Undying Lands. After many prosperous years the royal house



becomes infected with pride and resentment against the immortality of the Elves. The sphere of influence of the Núminórian sea-kings extends back to Middle-earth, and King Ar-Pharazôn wages war against Sauron, who eluded the army of the Valar at the end of the First Age and has set himself up as a second Dark Lord in Mordor. Sauron allows himself to be captured and taken to Núminor, where he corrupts Ar-Pharazôn further, instituting Morgoth worship. He persuades the King to defy the Ban of the Valar, against Men sailing west of Núminor, and to assail the Undying Lands to wrest immortality from the Valar. Manwë consults Ilúvatar, who himself intervenes to sink the entire Island of Núminor beneath the ocean, and changes the shape of the world, bending it into a globe and removing the Undying Lands from the physical world. Only Elendil, his two sons and their followers, who have remained faithful to Ilúvatar, are allowed to escape in their ships. This is at once Tolkien's deluge myth, as well as a retelling of the Atlantis legend.

Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age described the twin kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor that Elendil and his sons, Anárion and Isildur found in Middle-earth after fleeing the wrack of Núminor. Sauron also has escaped, and we learn that during the Second Age he had come disguised to the Elves of Eregion, calling himself Anatar, the Lord of Gifts, and taught the elven smiths the secret of forging rings of power. Celebrimbor forged nine that were given to princes of Men, seven for the lords of the dwarfs and three powerful rings for his own people, but Sauron treacherously forged one Ruling Ring, in the furnaces of Mt. Doom, by which he was able to ensnare the wielders of the lesser rings, although the Three Elven Rings remained beyond his grasp, since he had never touched them in their making. Re-established in Mordor, Sauron faces a seven year siege, with Elendil and the elven king Gil-galad determined to end his power once and for all. His body is eventually slain, and Isildur cuts the Ring from his finger, but foolishly chooses to keep it. He loses it in the River Anduin, when ambushed and slain by orcs, and many years later it is found by two hobbits, Sméagol and Déagol. Sméagol strangles his cousin for sole possession of the Ring, and slinks away to live by a subterranean lake under the Misty Mountains, shrivelling into the creature we know as Gollum. The cycle is complete, and Tolkien finishes this section with a brief overview of the events of the War of the Ring, leading to Sauron's destruction, as related in The Lord of the Rings.

The volume ends with numerous appendices, covering languages and genealogies. References are to the original Unwin Paperback Edition 1977

The Unfinished Tales [1980], a series of narratives and essays supplying additional information to the events narrated in The Silmarillion, The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. The astonishing detail of Tolkien's sub-creation is here most evident, in pieces ranging through full annals of the reigns

of the Kings of Núminor, a geographical description of the Island, an anthropological study of the Woses, the wild-men of Drúadan Forest, a biography of Galadriel and Celeborn, with details of Amroth, former king of Lothlórien, the history of the alliance between Gondor and Rohan and the details of the military organisation of the cavalry of Rohan. There are narratives that supplement those of The Hobbit (an account of how Gandalf came to fall in with Thorin's expedition and how he chose Bilbo to accompany them, which cleverly relates what in the wider view can only be seen as a trivial treasure hunt to Gandalf's concern for the long-term security policy of the West, which requires the elimination of the last dragon, Smaug, before Sauron becomes powerful enough to command his allegiance in the looming war against Gondor), and The Lord of the Rings (a full description of the course of the war in Rohan against Saruman, including the death of Thódred, Théoden's son, up to the point when Gandalf, Aragorn and the others reach Edoras). Most significant for this study, however, is the essay on the nature of The Istari, or wizards, discussing their origin as incarnate maiar, briefed with aiding in the overthrow of Sauron. References are to the original Unwin Edition of 1980.

The History of Middle-earth (ten volumes), is a vast corpus of early drafts and redrafts of what finally became the major works discussed above, charting the development of the *legendarium*. Included also are previously unknown pieces, particularly in the tenth volume, Morgoth's Ring, which contains extraordinary material, which seems to indicate that by the mid-fifties Tolkien was attempting to re-cast his entire creation. (See discussion in Chapter Seven of present study). All references are to the original hardback editions.

The abbreviations used in the chapter notes of this study refer to Tolkien's works as follows:

- Beo. - Beowulf; the Monsters and the Critics
- B.L.T.1 - The Book of Lost Tales Vol I
- B.L.T.2 - The Book of Lost Tales Vol.II
- F.G.H. - Farmer Giles of Ham
- F.R. - The Fellowship of the Ring
- Hobbit - The Hobbit
- L.B. - The Lays of Beleriand
- Letters - The Letters of J.R.R.Tolkien
- L.N. - Leaf by Niggle
- L.o.R. - The Lord of the Rings
- L.R. - The Lost Road and Other Writings
- M.R. - Morgoth's Ring
- O.F.S. - On Fairy Stories
- R.K. - The Return of the King
- R.S. - The Return of the Shadow
- S.M. - The Shaping of Middle-earth
- S.D. - Sauron Defeated

Sil. - The Silmarillion  
T.I. - The Treason of Isengard  
T.T. - The Two Towers  
U.T. - The Unfinished Tales  
W.R. - The War of the Ring



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1) WORKS BY J.R.R.TOLKIEN

Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics, originally published in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936), pp.245-295, London, O. U. P. Reprinted in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. L. E. Nicholson (University of Notre Dame Press 1963); references in this study are to the latter edition.

The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, (1961): Unwin Books Edition 1975, 2nd Impression 1977

Farmer Giles of Ham (1949), Allen & Unwin. Unwin Books Edition, 2nd Impression 1977

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight/Pearl/Sir Orfeo (London, Allen & Unwin 1975)

The History of Middle Earth, 10 vols. to date; ed. Christopher Tolkien, (London, Allen & Unwin:

- Vol I;        *The Book of Lost Tales (Part 1)*
- Vol. II;     *The Book of Lost Tales (Part 2)*
- Vol. III;    *The Lays of Beleriand*
- Vol. IV;     *The Shaping of Middle-earth*
- Vol. V;      *The Lost Road & Other Writings*
- Vol. VI;     *The Return of the Shadow*
- Vol. VII;    *The Treason of Isengard*
- Vol. VIII;   *The War of the Ring*
- Vol. IX;     *Sauron Defeated*
- Vol. X;      *Morgoth's Ring*

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again (1937): Allan & Unwin, London. 3rd edition 1966.

Leaf by Niggle (1945), in *The Dublin Review*, No. 432, p. 46-61. See Tree and Leaf below.

The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien (1981) ed. Carpenter, Allen & Unwin London.

The Lord of the Rings, 3 vols:

- The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) [F. R.]
- The Two Towers* (1954) [T. T.]
- The Return of the King* (1955) [R. K.]

On Fairy Stories (1947), [ O.F.S.] originally in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C.S. Lewis, London, O.U.P.

All references to this essay within this study are however to the slightly revised edition published in *Tree and Leaf* (London 1964, Allen & Unwin); 2nd edition 1988.

*Tree and Leaf* (London 1964); 2nd edition 1988 - includes full text of the poem *Mythopoeia*

*The Silmarillion* (London 1977, Allen & Unwin) [S11.]

*The Unfinished Tales* (London 1980, Allen & Unwin) [U. T.]

## 21 CRITICAL WORKS ON TOLKIEN

### [a] BOOKS:

Allan, J. (ed): *An Introduction to Elvish*, (March Press 1978; 3rd impression 1987)

Carpenter, H.: *The Inklings* (London 1978, Allen & Unwin; reissued Unwin Paperbacks 1982)

*J. R. R. Tolkien: a Biography*, (London 1977, Allen & Unwin; reissued Unwin Paperbacks 1987)

Giddings, R. (ed) *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land* (London 1983, Vision Press Ltd)

Flieger, Verlyn *Splintered Light; Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (Mich. U.S.A 1983, Eerdman's Publishing Co.)

Foster, Robert *A Guide to Middle Earth* (1971; London 1978, Unwin Paperbacks)

Harvey, David *The Song of Middle Earth* (London 1985, Allen & Unwin)

Helms, Randel *Tolkien and the Silmarils* (London 198\*, Thames & Hudson)

*Tolkien's World* (London 1974, Thames & Hudson)

Isaacs & Zimbardo (ed) *Tolkien and the Critics* (Ind. U.S.A. 1968, University of Notre Dame Press)

Kocher, Paul *Master of Middle Earth* (London 1982, Thames & Hudson)

Nitzsche, J.C. *Tolkien's Art* (London 1979, Macmillan)

Noel, Ruth S. *The Mythology of Middle Earth* (London 1977, Thames & Hudson)

- O'Neill, T. R. The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle Earth. (London 1980, Thames & Hudson)
- Shippey, T. A. The Road to Middle Earth (London 1982, Allen & Unwin)
- Urang, Gunnar Shadows of Heaven: religion and fantasy in the writings of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien (1971, S. C. M. Press Ltd)

[b] ARTICLES & PAPERS:

- Auden, W. H. The Quest Hero, in The Texas Quarterly IV, pp. 81-93 (1962)
- Boenig, Robert Tolkien and Old Germanic Ethics in Mythlore
- Christopher, J. J. R. R. Tolkien, Narnian Exile in Mythlore Nos. 55 & 56, 1988
- Deyo, S. M. Once Upon a Time, Once Upon a Parsec, in Mythos, vol. I: 11-12, Nov. 1983.
- Evans, Robley Tolkien's World Creation: Degenerative Recurrence in Mythlore No. 51 (Autumn 1987) pp. 5-8
- Filmer, K. An Allegory Unveiled in Mythlore No. 50 (1987)
- Hall, R. A. Silent Commands?: Frodo and Gollum at the Cracks of Doom in Mythlore No. 10.
- Who is the Master of the 'Precious'? in Mythlore No. 41 (1985)
- Hargrove, G. Who is Tom Bombadil? in Mythlore No. 47 (Autumn 1986) pp. 20-24
- Harrod, E. Trees in Tolkien, and What Happened Under Them, in Mythlore
- Helms, Randel All Tales Need Not Come True in Studies in the Literary Imagination 1981 Vol. 14/Fall pp. 31-45
- Lewis, C. S. The Dethronement of Power in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Isaacs & Zimbardo (see above)
- Jeffrey, D. L. Tolkien as Philologist in VII, vol. I
- Kocher, Paul Ilúvatar and the Secret Fire in Mythlore No. 43 (Autumn 1985) pp. 36-37
- Lobdall, J. (ed) A Tolkien Compass (La Salle, Illinois, 1975)



- Reilly, R. J. J. R. R. Tolkien: Cult or Culture (Australia, 1969, University of New England, Armidale)  
Tolkien and the Fairy Story in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Isaacs & Zimbardo (see above).
- Stimpson, C. R. J. R. R. Tolkien [Colombia Essays on Modern Writers No. 41] (Colombia University Press 1969)
- Treloar, J. L. Tolkien and Christian Concepts of Evil: apocalypse and privation in Mythlore No. 56 (Winter 1988) pp. 57-60
- Wilson, Edmund Oo, Those Awful Orcs in The Nation, Vol. 182, 14/4/56, pp. 312-314.
- Wytenbroek, J. R. Apocalyptic Vision in The Lord of the Rings in Mythlore No. 54 (Summer 1988) pp. 7-12

### 31 GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aichele, G The Limits of Story (Cal. U. S. A. 1985, The Society for Biblical Literature, Fortress Press)
- Auerbach, Erich Mimesis (Princeton Paperback 1968)  
Scenes from the Drama of European Life (Univ. Minnesota Press 1984)
- Barfield, Owen History in English Words (London 1926, Methuen & Co.)  
Poetic Diction (London 1952, Faber & Faber)  
The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays (U. S. A. 1977, Wesleyan University Press)  
Saving the Appearances (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc.)
- Berkeley, Geo. The Principles of Human Knowledge
- Berlin, Isaiah, Vico and Herder, (Hogarth Press 1975)
- Bultmann, R. The New Testament and Mythology in Kerygma and Myth, vol. 1, ed Bartsch (S. P. C. K.)
- Campbell, J. The Hero with One Thousand Faces, (Pantheon Books, N. Y. 1957)
- Chadwick, Nora The Celts (Pelican Books 1970)
- Coleridge, S. T. Biographia Literaria

- Crystal, David Linguistics (Penguin 1981)
- Edwards, M Towards a Christian Poetics
- Eliade, Mircea The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos & History (trans. W.R.Trask: Bollingen Series XLVI 1956; Princeton University Press/Bollingen 2nd paperback printing 1974)
- Ellis-  
Davidson, H. R. Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (London 1964, Penguin)
- Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: early Scandinavian and Celtic religions, (Manchester University Press 1988)
- Farrer, Austen Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (London 1962, Collins)
- A Rebirth of Images (London 1949, Dacre Press)
- Fordham, Frieda An Introduction to Jung's Psychology (2nd Ed. Penguin Books 1959)
- Frazer, J. G. The Golden Bough (Macmillan (abridged ed.))
- Freud, S. The Early Church (S. C. M. 1982)
- Frye, Northrop The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton 1973)
- Creation and Recreation (Toronto 1980)
- The Great Code (London 1982, R. K. P.)
- The Secular Scripture
- Henderson, I. Myth in the New Testament (1952, S. C. P. Press)
- Hooke, S. H. The Siege Perilous, (S. C. M. Press, 1956)
- Josipovici, G. The Book of God (Yale 1988)
- Jung, C. G. The Collected Works (R. K. P.; 19 volumes)
- Kermode, Frank The Sense of an Ending (O. U. P. 1966)
- Kierkegaard, S. Either/Or (trans. H. V. & E. H. Hong, Princeton)
- Fear and Trembling (trans. A. Hannay)
- Le Guin, U. K. The Language of the Night; Essays on Fantasy & Science Fiction (revised edition, London 1989, The Women's Press)

- Lonergan, B. Method in Theology, 2nd edition (London 1973).
- Lewis, C. S. Preface to 'Paradise Lost' O. U. P.
- McFague, Sallie Speaking in Parables (Fortress Press, Phil. 1975)
- McKusick Coleridge's Philosophy of Language
- Philo Judeacus De Opificio Mundi (Loeb Classical Library)
- Prickett, S. Words and the Word (1986, Cambridge University Press)
- Rolleston, T. W. Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race
- Sarns, N. M. Understanding Genesis: the Heritage of Biblical Israel (N. Y. 1966)
- Schneidau, H. Sacred Discontent: the Bible and Western Tradition
- Steiner, G. After Babel (O. U. P. 1975)
- Real Presences (Faber 1989)
- Tyler, S. The Said and the Unsaid
- Vermeš, Geza Jesus the Jew (Collins 1973)
- Velakovsky, I. Mankind in Amnesia (London 1982)
- Vico, G. Scienza Nova (trans. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch)
- Walker, B. Gnosticism: its History and Influence (Aquarian Press 1989)
- Wand, J. W. C. A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500 (Methuen 1974)

